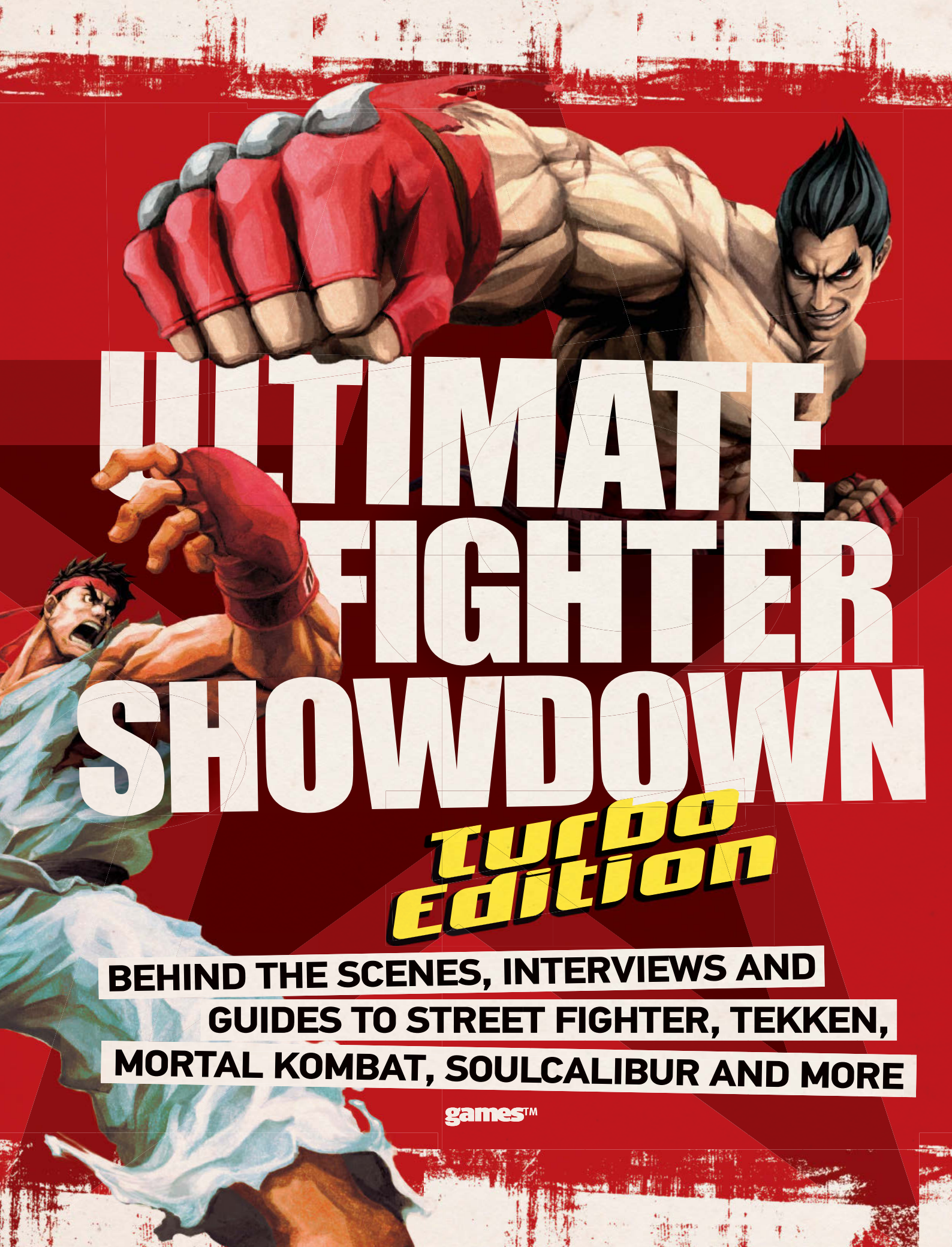


The background of the cover features a dynamic illustration of two Street Fighter characters in combat. At the top, a large, muscular character with blue hair and a red headband (Ryu) is shown from the chest up, leaning forward with a determined expression. He is wearing red boxing gloves and has a red band on his right wrist. Below him, another character with dark hair and a red headband (Ken) is shown in a similar pose, also wearing red boxing gloves and a red band on his right wrist. The characters are set against a red background with a white grid pattern. The title "ULTIMATE FIGHTER SHOWDOWN" is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the center. Below the title, the words "TURBO Edition" are written in a stylized, yellow, italicized font with a black outline.

ULTIMATE FIGHTER SHOWDOWN

TURBO Edition

**BEHIND THE SCENES, INTERVIEWS AND
GUIDES TO STREET FIGHTER, TEKKEN,
MORTAL KOMBAT, SOULCALIBUR AND MORE**

games™

ULTIMATE FIGHTER SHOWDOWN

TURBO EDITION

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Hall Of Fame...

Ryu

Capcom's Street Fighter franchise brought personality to a genre, and, arguably, at the heart of that genre was a character. His name was Ryu

■ ■ ■ **"SWIFT AS THE** wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain", so reads the Fūuikazan (the motto of Japanese warlord Takeda Shingen) often drawn on Ryu's belt. After appearing in over 30 games, Ryu has more than proved his immovability. His perfect combination of moves, Shoryuken (Dragon Punch), Hadouken (Fireball) and Tatsumaki Senpuukyaku (Hurricane Kick) are a bible to all 2D fighting games. Ryu clones permeate the entire 2D beat-'em-up market to such an extent that finding a single fighting game without some form of dragon punch or fireball is virtually impossible. Ryu has long been a gaming icon and now, with the announcement of *Street Fighter IV*, he seems set to continue his dominance past the 20-year mark well into the future.

Prior to the release of *Street Fighter II* in 1991, beat-'em-ups had failed to find their feet. Games like *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and *Karate Champ* had found popularity but not reached the genre's potential. Using its newly developed CPS-1 arcade board and six-button cabinet, Capcom unveiled *Street Fighter II*, and the entire genre was turned upside down. Suddenly, there were eight playable characters, instead of just one, plus a stable of moves for each. Not only did this increase gameplay but it also gave rise to personality in the genre, as gamers could choose their favourite character and fighting style. Favouritism led to fandom and finally to a kind of personal heroism. Every character had their fan base but it was Ryu that would capture the heart of the genre.

Very much the 'wandering warrior' archetype, Ryu battles not so much for victory as for the fight itself and for the spiritual journey, a personality that is reflected in his appearance – he wears nothing more than his traditional Gi (karate outfit), black belt and headband. An

orphaned child, Ryu was adopted and trained in the Nin-Ansatsuken martial art by Gouken, who also introduced Ryu to his sparring partner and surrogate brother, Ken. At age 23 Ryu set off to enter the first World Warrior tournament, encountering Sagat and permanently scarring him with a lethal Metsu Shoryuken attack.

The original *Street Fighter* story is purportedly based on the real-life events of Yoshiji Soeno. Soeno, a karate legend, embarked on a solo mission to Thailand (Sagat's home) to face the masters of Muay Thai. Arriving in Bangkok, Soeno's abilities were doubted and he was told by the Rachadamnern Stadium to make a name for himself in Northern Thailand before returning to Bangkok to fight. Soeno did so, earning the attention of Muay Thai master Reiba, 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai'. After defeating Reiba's disciple, Mongkut Kalop, the 'Dark Warrior', Soeno was ready to face the 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai' himself. The similarities are obvious and further evidence can be seen in the Japanese martial-arts comic *Karate Baka Ichidai* (The Karate Idiot), in which Soeno and Reiba are drawn in a near-identical manner to Ryu and

Sagat. This reference to real life continues into *Street Fighter II*; in 1975, a year after Soeno's trip to Thailand, the first World Open was held, pitting fighters of different styles against each other.

■ ■ ■ **WHILE RYU'S CHARACTER** was changed to that of a con artist, caught up in Guile's war against Shadaloo, for the *Street Fighter* movie, this had very little relevance to his character in the gaming world, leaving his true development to the release of *Street Fighter Alpha* in 1995.

On returning home in the *Alpha* series, Ryu finds Gouken murdered at the hands of Akuma. Ryu vows to avenge Gouken and sets off to hunt for Akuma, finally encountering him on Gokuentou Island, where he learns of the dark power, Satsui no Hadou, inside him, a power that will drive Ryu to kill his opponents. It is this battle within Ryu, the archetypal good versus evil and inner temptation, that has fuelled his character ever since. Originally introduced in Masahiko Nakahira's manga, *Street Fighter Zero*, Evil Ryu was first introduced into Capcom's canon in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*. As with Akuma, Evil Ryu's character is summed up with the signature symbol on his back; in *Alpha 3*, the symbol is Satsu (meaning 'murder'), in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* it is Metsu (meaning 'destruction'). Evil Ryu, however, has never been a character in his own right, serving instead as a 'what might have been'.

As with almost all games of *Street Fighter's* fame, the story has made its way into multiple other media. The height of *Street Fighter's* success has chiselled Ryu's name into the annals of the gaming industry and pop culture in general. Ryu leapt to fighting supremacy two decades ago with a now gospel-like move set, and not once has he been dethroned – he is a true gaming champion.

>. MAGIC MOMENTS



■ The release of *Street Fighter* in 1987 sees the birth of the most important beat-'em-up series in history.



■ What do we need to say? It's *Street Fighter II*. Taker of a thousand coins, bringer of a thousand clones.



■ The *Alpha* series saw Ryu's first true character development, with the introduction of Evil Ryu.



■ Take the greatest fighter ever, add a pinch of superheroes and some stupidly over-the-top specials et voilà... awesome fun.

HALL OF FAME... RYU

■ FACE ■

Ryu bares an uncanny resemblance to martial-art comic *Karate Baka Ichida's* Soeno, believed to be the original influence for the now-legendary character. Ryu's features changed significantly in *Street Fighter III*, with black hair, brown eyes and much more facial stubble.

■ HAIRBAND ■

Ryu has worn several hairbands throughout the years. In the original *Street Fighter*, he sported a white headband, which was switched to red for *Street Fighter II*. After beating Ryu in the *Alpha* series, Ken gives Ryu his red hairband to remind him to stay focused and to remember their battle.

■ GI (OUTFIT) ■

Training and fighting is Ryu's life, so he is very rarely seen without his Gi – a traditional karate outfit. The Gi would be tattered and torn, from overuse, by the time of *Street Fighter III*.

■ NAME ■

The name Ryu can be translated as meaning 'Dragon', hence 'Dragon Punch'. It is a common name used throughout other Japanese videogames such as *Shenmue* and *Ninja Gaiden* but *Street Fighter* was arguably the first game to use it and remains the most iconic.

■ FEET ■

In the original *Street Fighter*, Ryu wore red slippers, yet in both *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter III*, he prefers to fight barefoot. Perhaps his vagabond lifestyle has left him unable to afford new shoes. Or maybe he's just that hard.

■ BELT ■

The black belt is, of course, the symbol of a martial-arts master. In some official artwork, the Fuuikazan is written on Ryu's belt. Translated it reads: "Swift as the wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain." The Kanji (Japanese script) is taken from Tzu's Art of War, a code for battle conduct.



■ Ryu and Ken were the only World Warriors lucky enough to receive the glorious CPS-3 makeover.



■ SNK took the reins for *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* and redrew Ryu in its own unique, harder-edged style.



■ Updated for the widescreen generation, Ryu gets a smooth, high-definition makeover in 2008.



■ Ryu and Ken will return in *Street Fighter IV*, tougher and meaner than ever. But will they be 2D or 3D?

Hall Of Fame... **RYU** THE WORLD WARRIORS



APPEARANCE:

Near-identical to Ryu, his red Gi has the arms ripped off and his hair nods towards his free-spirit lifestyle.

"Attack me if you dare, I will crush you"

Hadouken



APPEARANCE:

It's more than obvious which boxer Balrog's Japanese name, M.Bison, refers to. Add to that the cornrow

hairstyle, narrow eyes and huge arms and you've got yourself the self-proclaimed "baddest man on the planet".

"Get up, you wimp"

Straight Dash Punch



U.S.A.



MEXICO



BRAZIL



U.S.A.



JAMAICA



SPAIN

ENG



APPEARANCE:

T. Hawk's entire design, from his feathered hair and face-paint to his cross-legged winning pose, is based on Mexican tribesmen.

"Your scream sounds like a pathetic war cry"

Mexican Typhoon



APPEARANCE:

Guile's appearance was intended to appeal to American fans, with blonde hair and blue eyes, but most importantly, his army fatigues.

"Are you man enough to fight with me?"

Sonic Boom

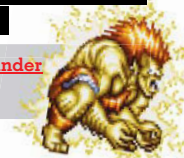


APPEARANCE:

The archetypal beast-man, original concept art suggests Blanka was initially intended to be a caveman. Rumour has it that this original design became King Rasta Mon from *Saturday Night Slam Masters*.

"Seeing you in action is a joke"

Electric Thunder



APPEARANCE:

Dee Jay's constant smile, thumbs-up gesture, loose drawstring pants and maracas all symbolise the laid-back lifestyle of Jamaica. The only character designed by Capcom USA, James Goddard modelled Dee Jay on martial-arts film star Billy Banks.

"Your problem is that you don't have any rhythm"

Double Dread Kick



APPEARANCE:

Vega's performance is a nod towards the famous matadors of Spain. Early artwork suggests Vega was initially intended to be a knight in armour – his mask and claw are remnants of this.

"Handsome fighters never lose battles"

Claw Thrust



HALL OF FAME... RYU



APPEARANCE:
As with Guile, Cammy's pale skin and blonde hair are designed to appeal to the American and European audience.

"You must enjoy being beat. Let me remodel your face one more time"

Cannon Drill



APPEARANCE:
Zangief's design is of the stereotypical large, muscular Russian. His size is emphasised by his lack of clothing.

"My strength is much greater than yours"

Spinning Pile Driver



APPEARANCE:
Chun Li wears a qipao, a traditional Chinese dress, popular in the early 20th Century. Her hairstyle, 'ox-horns', is typical among Chinese children.

"I am the strongest woman in the world"

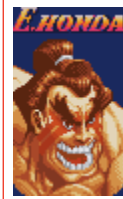
Spinning Bird Kick



APPEARANCE:
M.Bison's red uniform, cap and perfect posture give the air of a high-ranking military officer. His cap also carries the skull insignia of his crime syndicate, Shadaloo.

"Get lost! You can't compare with my powers"

Psycho Crusher



APPEARANCE:
E.Honda is full of Japanese traditions. His hair, the Chonmage style, is a tradition carried on from the samurai and now popular in the sumo world. His face-paint style is known as Kumadori, a style prevalent in Kabuki actors and he wears a Yukata, a very popular outfit in Japan.

"Can't you do better than that?"

Sumo Head Butt



APPEARANCE:
Dhalsim's necklace is assembled from the skulls of children that died in his village. Did he kill them himself? We wouldn't put it past him. The creep.

"I will meditate and then destroy you"

Yoga Flame



APPEARANCE:
Sagat's appearance is believed to derive from Thailand's Muay Thai master Reiba, as depicted in the manga *Karate Baka Ichidai*.

"You are not a warrior; you are a beginner"

Tiger Knee



APPEARANCE:
Fei Long is a tribute to Bruce Lee. They're from the same city and look identical. Fei Long translated also means 'flying dragon' and Lee's screen name was 'little dragon'.

"You have trained to be a great loser. Now you must learn to fight"

Shienkyaku



APPEARANCE:
Ryu is one of the most copied archetypes in fighting games, his look is generic but effective.

"You must defeat my Dragon Punch to stand a chance"

Sho-Ryu-Ken





Street Wise

■ Fascinating Street Fighter trivia that we've always wanted to tell you about, but never had the opportunity...
until now

If there's one series that virtually every gamer has played, then it has to be *Street Fighter*. With that in mind, we asked a few friends of **games™** for their memories and opinions of the hallowed franchise. Here's what they had to say...

Jonathan Reilly, Character Modeller, Bizarre Creations

“It's a while since I played, but my fave version would have to be *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. It's the most in-depth and skilful version of the game, and I think it's the best looking by far. It has the most beautifully animated hand-drawn sprites of any version”



“I hate the art of fighting, but I want to be king of the fighters”

■ Spoken by character Dan Hibiki, the above is a win quote from *Street Fighter Alpha 3*. To the casual observer it may seem nothing more than a peculiar comment, but to those in the know it's far more telling. Introduced as a secret character in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*, Dan is a retaliation of sorts to SNK's 1992 *Art Of Fighting*, whose lead character Ryo Sakazaki bore a rather striking resemblance to *Street Fighter*'s Ryu. The digs at SNK's fighter are easy to spot if you know what to look for, such as Hibiki's one-handed fireballs or unlimited taunts. A more overt reference can be found in *SVC Chaos: SNK Vs Capcom*, in which Dan is often mistaken for Ryo, even by himself during a mirror match.

Back On Board

■ In late-2003, around the time of the release of *Hyper Street Fighter II*, Capcom announced a move away from arcade development. The Japanese videogame giant had previously created several popular arcade-system boards, but the decline in the market had convinced Capcom to step aside. While *Street Fighter IV* marks the developer's return to the arcades, it doesn't operate on Capcom hardware – making it the first canonical *Street Fighter* game not to do so. Instead, *Street Fighter IV* runs on the Taito Type X2 board, which is not only inexpensive, it's also straightforward for developers to upgrade on.

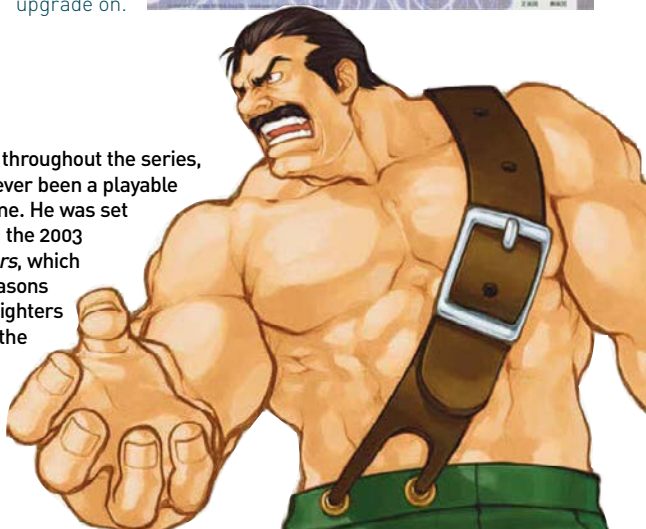


Born In The USA

■ In November 2004, long-time Capcom illustrator Akira Yasuda announced on his blog that Capcom Japan had sold the *Street Fighter* rights to its subsidiary, Capcom USA. The internet responded with its usual knee-jerk reaction and claimed that the franchise should now be considered dead and buried. Four years on, however, the series is arguably stronger than ever with both *Street Fighter IV* and *Super Street Fighter II HD Remix* in production. Let's all take a deep breath now.

Haggar

■ Despite numerous references throughout the series, *Final Fight*'s Mike Haggar has never been a playable character in a *Street Fighter* game. He was set to feature as a main character in the 2003 coin-op *Capcom Fighting All-Stars*, which was unfortunately canned for reasons unknown. The only one-on-one fighters he's appeared in to date include the wrestling title *Saturday Night Slam Masters* and Saturn's appalling 3D brawler *Final Fight Revenge*. You have to feel sorry for the guy.



LET'S ALL DO THE
STREET FIGHTER III
RAP SONG

■ Prepare for the battle, prepare for the war - Prepare for the worst *Street Fighter* blood brawl - The third of the third, prepare to die for - Your life's on the line so I'ma take yours
■ So who wanna blood dance with me? - If your body wrapped up or you're in a street fantasy - In the square yo, you're best to beware - *Street Fighter*, we ain't playin' over here
■ One on one kid you know you get finished - Round 1, round 2, so come and get with it - Your heart ain't cold so forget about the power - Battle this out to the 24th hour

Jonathan Town, Marketing Co-Ordinator, Gamestation

“If we’re talking hours spent, then *Street Fighter II* (SNES and arcade) is the winner by a mile. However, my personal favourite is *Street Fighter Alpha* purely for the genius that is the chain-combo system as well as the wonderfully drawn cats strolling around on some of the backgrounds”



Fight For The Right

■ DAIGO IKENO, THE lead character designer on *Street Fighter IV*, has been working with Capcom since 1994 when he triumphed at the *Street Fighter II: Battle Event*. The contest gathered together 200 *Street Fighter* fanatics, so it’s clear that Ikeno’s success was due to an obsessive knowledge of the *Street Fighter* universe. His first project was *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, but since then the talented artist has worked on the *Onimusha* and *Devil May Cry* series, as well as *Dead Rising*. Over the last 14 years, Ikeno has become incredibly popular with *Street Fighter* fans thanks to his exceptional paintings and illustrations.

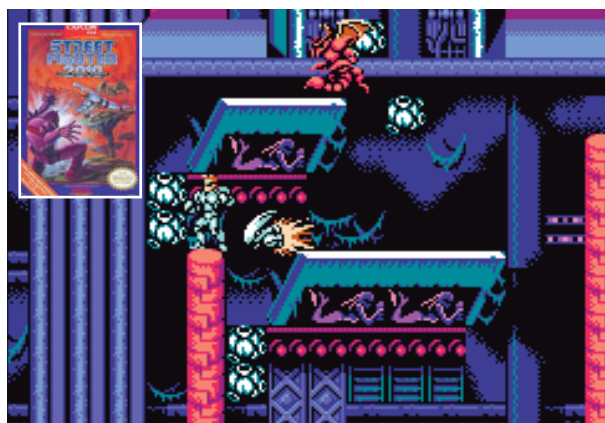


Cliff Bleszinski, Game Designer, Epic

“Chun Li. Thick helicopter thighs. Nuff said”

The Black Sheep

■ There’s one in almost every series: the game that everyone would rather forget. While the expansive *Street Fighter* arguably has several, it’s the embarrassing 1990 NES platformer *Street Fighter 2010: The Final Fight* that really takes the biscuit. Upon its release in Japan, *Street Fighter 2010* shared only a name with the seminal fighter. However, the story did not stay intact on its trip to America, with Capcom USA spotting the potential for a cash-in. Futuristic cop Kevin became ex-street fighter Ken Masters, now a cyborg scientist who created the ‘cyboplasm’ responsible for the game’s mutants. Sensibly regarded as non-canon, it’s best you give this one a miss.



Charlie Blanka

■ IN THE 1994 live-action *Street Fighter* movie, Blanka is revealed to be Charlie, an old friend of Guile’s who is tortured and mutilated by M Bison. The ending to the original *Street Fighter II*, however, directly contradicts this by revealing Blanka’s real name to be Jimmy. Strangely enough, Capcom’s *Street Fighter Alpha*, released a year after the film, introduced a new character by the name of Charlie Nash, who happened to be Guile’s air force partner. So who invented the character? Capcom actually. During Guile’s ending to *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* (set after *Street Fighter Alpha*) he visits Charlie’s grave, following his friend’s death at the hands of M Bison.



Live And Kicking



■ 1994’s live-action movie wasn’t the first to feature

Street Fighter characters – that pleasure goes to 1993’s *City Hunter*. In this rather silly martial arts flick, Jackie Chan plays a private investigator who, at one stage during the film, hallucinates that he is both E Honda and Chun Li. And if the idea of Jackie Chan dressed up as Chun Li wasn’t interesting enough, then we should also point out that E Honda’s name was changed to E Honde. Why? Because Chan is a spokesman for Mitsubishi and the filmmakers didn’t want one of the firm’s brands to get a free mention.

LET’S ALL DO THE
STREET FIGHTER III
RAP SONG!

■ Pay the price that you could’t deal with - Cold-blooded killers in my LockDown click - Got no time to waste, we’re ticking time bombs - *Street Fighter III* like this scar on my arm
■ Make your first move, so what’s in gonna be? - You’re trapped in the new world of *Street Fighter III* - The third chapter so what’s it gonna be? - You’re trapped in the new world of *Street Fighter III*
■ Rock what you got. Block what you shot - Another chapter, what you get’s what you got - Nuff warriors here to fight, choose one - The best of the best will be the champion

STREETWISE

Stephen Penson, Gameplay Coder, Bizarre Creations

“I remember drooling over *Street Fighter II* in the arcades, but I was useless at it. It's only since Nick, our audio manager, brought in SNKVs *Capcom Chaos* that I've been awakened to its delights. I favour *SVC Chaos*, though it's not a 'proper' *Street Fighter* game. I prefer four attack buttons to *Street Fighter*'s six. My favourite *Street Fighter* is *3rd Strike*. I like the fast *Street Fighter II* battles, but *3rd Strike* is slightly slower paced and that suits me... plus it has the concept of parries, which are frustratingly addictive to achieve”



Super Sub

■ Although Capcom intended to follow up *Street Fighter Alpha* with *Street Fighter III*, it soon became clear that the true sequel was taking longer than anticipated. To ensure that the rabid fan base was kept amused, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* was developed as a stopgap. Of course, some fans would argue that *Alpha 2* wasn't essential as a result of this, but it included a number of changes and improvements nevertheless. A new feature, the custom combo replaced *Alpha*'s chain combos; additional characters were added to the roster; and the character's stages, cut-scenes, and endings were also revised.

Skullo Dream



■ It's Skullomania's colourful history that marks him out as one of the more memorable *Street Fighter EX* characters. Once an average salesman, unhappy with his lot in life, he volunteered to dress up and perform like a superhero

at a carnival for a top customer. Doing so inspired him to become a vigilante crime fighter – a considerable change in occupation. Something of a parody of Japanese tokusatsu, *Skullomania* has since been fondly remembered for his eccentric moves and unusual fashion sense, which falls somewhere between Kamen Rider and Skeletor.

Skullomania was created by Arika – a company founded by ex-*Street Fighter II* designers – and the character's copyright has remained with them ever since. This may explain why he's one of the few *SF* characters to appear outside Capcom's games, most notably in *Fighter Maker* and *Technitix*, both developed by Arika. Sadly, he's never made an appearance in the flagship *Street Fighter* titles.

Punch Out

■ Particularly observant *Street Fighter* fans might have noticed that *SFIV* does not feature any boxers, unlike *SF1* (Mike), *II* (Balrog), and *III* (Dudley). However, the latest version does feature wrestlers, which, via the likes of Zangief, Hugo, R Mika, and El Fuerte, have been present in the series since *SFII*. Is this pure coincidence or does this change show that wrestling is now considered the more popular sport?



Soft-Banned Sagat

■ According to the developers at Capcom, Sagat is 'soft banned' in all *Street Fighter II* tournaments across Japan. This means that there's an unspoken agreement between players that nobody will use him despite the fact that the judges would allow it. The reason for this can mostly be attributed to his extremely powerful fireballs, which can be thrown at both low and high heights. As such, the team behind *Super Street Fighter II HD Remix* have spent considerable time trying to soften Sagat's abilities while keeping him a worthwhile fighter.

LET'S ALL DO THE
STREET FIGHTER III
RAP SONG!

■ Whose world is this after all? Capcom living with LockDown forever y'all - This contains scenes of violence and death - Viewers own discretion, some ain't ready yet
■ If a pack they ain't ready step up with all you got - With the fighters who ain't ready take your regular spot - So what? Come down before it's too late to stop - Trying to front like you was kids of the block
■ Step too close kid you might get shot - Only one master's goin' straight to the top - One false move your whole game gets blocked - Only one master's goin' straight to the top

Martyn Chudley, Managing Director, Bizarre Creations

“I’m afraid that *Street Fighter* has completely passed me by. I’m crap at it, but we do have a couple of *Street Fighter* nuts here in the office, we have a dedicated *Street Fighter* arcade cabinet in the common room”

Ste Pickford, Co-founder, Zee-3

“I never enjoyed *Street Fighter*, so I don’t have any favourite character or anything like that. I much preferred the scrolling style of *Final Fight*. I didn’t get on with the one-on-one pure fighting format of *Street Fighter*”

“Sorry But I Win This Time”

■ *Street Fighter* has long been known for its unlockable characters. Take, for example, Akuma in *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. However, the first ‘secret’ character appeared long before this – as early as the 1987 arcade *Street Fighter*. While the game would allow the player to select only Ryu, a second player could join in and play as Ken in competitive bouts. If the second player proved victorious then they would be granted the opportunity to play through the tournament as Ken. It was a simple precursor to what would become a series custom.



Sonic Boom

■ As the designer of the various poses and movements of *Street Fighter II*'s characters, Akira Yasuda is inevitably very popular with *SF* fans. To describe his work on *Street Fighter II*, Yasuda (or Akiman as he is commonly known) coined the term ‘boom’, to mean the visual combination of martial arts styles and pop idol movements. Interestingly, much of the artwork that has been unveiled for *Street Fighter IV*, though created by a group of new Capcom artists, appears to be very similar to Yasuda’s original designs. Yasuda left Capcom in 2003, ending an employment of some 18 years, but it seems that his influence has yet to wane.

The Southern Comet

■ Dee Jay, first seen in *Super Street Fighter II* is notable for two reasons. First, he is the only character in the series modelled by Capcom USA, and second, he is based on real-life martial arts film star Billy Blanks – seen in such silver-screen greats as *Bloodfist* and *TC 2000*. Dee Jay has never been a very popular character, appearing in just one other game outside the *Street Fighter II* series. Rather tellingly, the entry for *Super Street Fighter II* in Capcom’s official history book, *Street Fighter Eternal Challenge*, dedicates a paragraph to each of the ‘new challengers’, except for Dee Jay. Even Capcom seems ashamed of him.



Proving Palatable

■ In the original arcade version of *Street Fighter II*, it was impossible for players to fight each other using the same character – the closest solution would be to pit Ken against Ryu. This was solved with *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition*, which made full use of a feature known as ‘palette swapping’. This process – which basically means that an existing sprite is reused with different coloration – is present in many older videogames as an effective way of reducing data size. Despite the near absence of palette swapping in *Street Fighter II*, we should mention that the game did contain one example of ‘head swapping’. This process, which is fairly self-explanatory, is used on Ryu and Ken. Below the neck, the characters are almost identical.

LET'S ALL DO THE
STREET FIGHTER III
RAP SONG!

■ You're about to get your life with something you wish you wouldn't - It's too late, you gotta borrow what you wish you couldn't - Pass the first stage, you thought you could live it - Now you just realised you never could survive it
■ Dealin' with cold-blooded assassins - Decapitate your body, leave the food to alligators - You needa put your power over here it's much greater - It's either you push start or try again later
■ It's all about the confidence, but they don't cater - You got no time to talk to the player haters - I guess one fly kick will leave your body critical - Talkin' bout real street thugs and big criminals

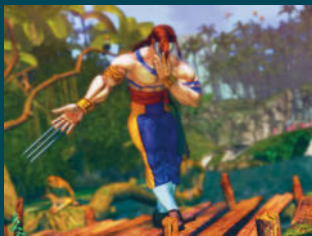
Leo Tan, UK PR Manager, Capcom

“It’s cheating, but I think *Street Fighter IV* is the best in the series. It offers something for all *SF* fans. The new Focus attack offers an easy defensive dynamic for beginners, the Focus cancelling caters for the *SFIII* hardcore and their insane levels of technical expertise, and the somewhat eased timings needed to pull off Special moves means everyone can enjoy high-level play without spending hours perfecting their raw physical skills. It’s more inclusive without having to dumb down what makes *Street Fighter* great”

From The Horse’s Mouth

■ Looking for some trivia on *Street Fighter IV*, we went straight to the source and asked Capcom for some nuggets of info on its latest one-on-one. This is what Capcom’s UK PR manager had to offer...

“Vega has a command to throw off his claw and a command to throw off his mask. These remove a chunk each from his Super bar”

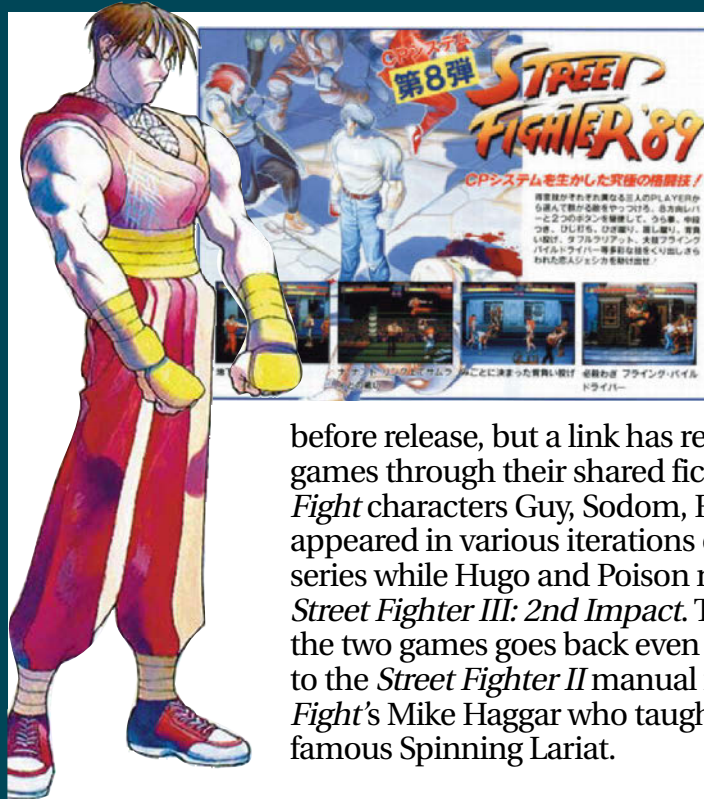


“The Focus attack command can be used as a parry, a Special move canceller, an unblockable strike, and a fake to draw out Specials”

“Blanka can hop over opponents’ bodies as he rises from a fall”



“Dhalsim can evade all strikes by pressing down and all three punch buttons”



Street Fighter '89

■ While Capcom’s *Final Fight* clearly takes its cues from *Double Dragon*, it was originally presented at tradeshow as a *Street Fighter* sequel under the title *Street Fighter '89*.

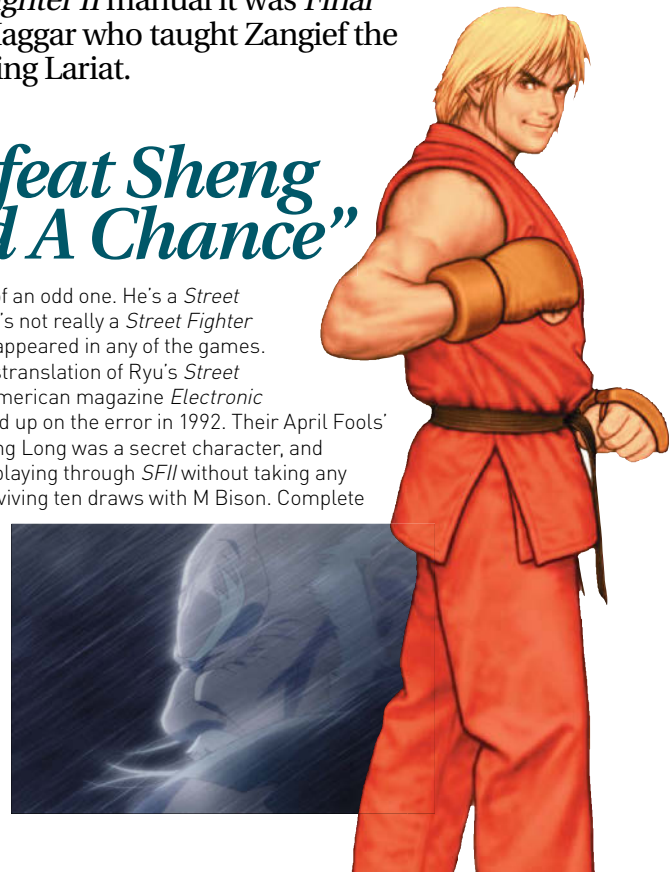
The name was changed before release, but a link has remained between the two games through their shared fictional universe. *Final Fight* characters Guy, Sodom, Rolento, and Cody have all appeared in various iterations of the *Street Fighter Alpha* series while Hugo and Poison make an appearance in *Street Fighter III: 2nd Impact*. The relationship between the two games goes back even further, however. According to the *Street Fighter II* manual it was *Final Fight*’s Mike Haggar who taught Zangief the famous Spinning Lariat.

“You Must Defeat Sheng Long To Stand A Chance”



■ Sheng Long’s a bit of an odd one. He’s a *Street Fighter* character who’s not really a *Street Fighter* character as he’s not appeared in any of the games. Originating from a mistranslation of Ryu’s *Street Fighter II* win quote, American magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly* picked up on the error in 1992. Their April Fools’ joke claimed that Sheng Long was a secret character, and could be unlocked by playing through *SFII* without taking any damage, and then surviving ten draws with M Bison. Complete nonsense, of course, but he’s been part of

the *Street Fighter* legacy ever since. Sheng Long did very nearly make an appearance in the videogame of *Street Fighter: The Movie* – before Capcom decided to deny its previous approval of his appearance in the game – and it is believed that Sheng Long provided part of the basis for both Akuma and Gouken. The latter of which, incidentally, is rumoured to make his first playable appearance as a secret character in *Street Fighter IV*.



LET'S ALL DO THE
STREET FIGHTER III
RAP SONG!

■ Now you're helpless all the way to the finish - Where you can practise, come back and get with it - You can't block my hits, the sky's no limit - Anything distant yo it's infinite
■ Make your first move, so what's in gonna be? - You're trapped in the new world of *Street Fighter III* - The third chapter so what's it gonna be? -
You're trapped in the new world of *Street Fighter III* - Fight for the future, so what's it gonna be? - The third strike y'all it's *Street Fighter III*

BEAT







BEHIND THE SCENES

MORTAL KOMBAT

In 1991 the fighting genre belonged to Japan, but the next year the Americans came along and did it their way – louder, more violent and totally headline-grabbing. Original designer John Tobias explains how it was done



Released: 1992

Format: Arcade

Publisher: Midway

Developer: In-house

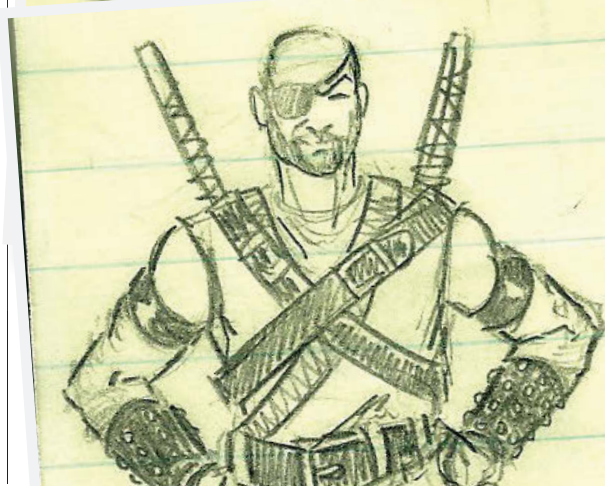
KEY STAFF:

John Tobias:
Design and Graphics
Ed Boon:
Design and Software
Dan Forden:
Music and Sounds
John Vogel:
Background Graphics

THIS YEAR (WHICH is 2012 if you happen to be reading this in one of our Retro compilations), Capcom is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the fighting game series that put the genre on the map, but while the original *Street Fighter* was little more than a modest success in the arcades, its fiercest competitor erupted onto the scene in an inaugural debut that was much more convincing. This was none other than *Mortal Kombat*, a game that not only paved the way for the Entertainment Software Ratings Board in the United States with its barbaric Fatalities, but was also pieced together by a team of four passionate people in just under a year.

"As a kid I read superhero comics religiously and found myself drawing my favourites at a very early age," states *Mortal Kombat* co-creator John Tobias, who began his career as a comic book artist. "My dream was always to illustrate a *Superman*, *Batman* or *Spider-Man* book, but that kind of changed as I got older. I became more interested in creating my own characters. My work on *The Real Ghostbusters* comic was kind of a letdown because I was in school at the time and needed an income. With the exception of a few issues, my work was always rushed and the publisher was a bit unscrupulous."

Tobias's frustrations didn't last long. After finishing school, he was hired by Bally Midway on the back of his design skills. "What I knew of computer graphics at the time was entirely self-taught," he confesses. "Schools didn't have much in the way of a curriculum that could prepare you for work in the industry. Fortunately, I was a videogame junkie and arcade rat growing up, so I knew what I liked and what I thought I could provide." But despite the continuing rise of videogames as an entertainment medium, Bally Midway was a pinball purveyor first and foremost. **CONTINUED >**



WHAT I KNEW OF GRAPHICS AT THE TIME WAS ENTIRELY SELF-TAUGHT



BEHIND THE SCENES MORTAL KOMBAT



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

SNAGGLETOOTH

▲ All I remember at the time, being all of 11 years old, was looking at this game and thinking 'Hell yeah!' at how totally badass it was. Then my dad saw it and forbade me from playing it because it wasn't appropriate. I was just glad I got to play it occasionally round a friend's house. While it wasn't the first violent game, given the nature of the graphics at the time, it's no surprise it was at the head of so much controversy. But at the same time it paved the way over the years for more violence in games.

Posted by:

RICHHOYLE24

▲ I remember spending a ton of 20p pieces trying to get a Double Flawless Victory with a Fatality on the bridge level after hearing a rumour at school about Reptile. I never managed it, but I did feel like a total legend after pulling off Kano's Fatality after nobody in my local arcade knew how to do it.

Posted by:

ALISTAIR THOMAS

▲ I ended up on the receiving end of some foul language while watching (in comparison to my younger self at the time) a grown-up play. I guess he didn't like my constant advice of 'back, back, punch!' while he was trying to beat Goro.

Posted by:

SLAPPY MCGUIRE

▲ Liu Kang, sounding like a ruddy ninja chipmunk. That's my memory of the arcade game.

Posted by:

TREDOSS

▲ At the time, Sub-Zero's fatality was the only one anyone seemed to know... but he was badass so nobody cared.



SHANG LAO

= TO THE WORLD HE IS A LITTLE KNOWN WARRIOR, RULER OF AN ISLAND FORTRESS AND HOST TO A LEGENDARY MARTIAL ARTS TOURNAMENT. IN REALITY, HE IS A DEMON OF VAST DESTRUCTIVE POWERS. HE WAS CURSED BY HIS GODS AND MUST DRINK THE BLOOD OF TRUE WARRIORS IN ORDER TO APPEASE THEM.

UNKNOWN TO MOST THE PARTICIPANTS, THE KUN IS THE MEANS SHANG LAO EMPLOYS TO OBTAIN THE WARRIORS HE NEEDS FOR HIS UNHOLY CEREMONIAL SHANG LAO'S ARMY

- ALONG WITH A SMALL POWERFUL ARMY OF HENCHMEN, SHANG LAO ALSO UTILIZES SERVICES OF TAOIST SORCERERS, THEIR MONKS AS WELL AS VARIOUS OTHER WORLD

ARCHETYPES FOR CHARACTERS

1. LIU KANG = HERO / PROTAGONIST
2. MICHAEL GRIMA = SIDERICK
3. KURTIS STRYKER = SKEPTIC
4. RAIDEN = MENTOR
5. KANO = TRICKSTER
6. NINJA = HUNTER
7. NINJA = HUNTED
8. GONGORO = THRESHOLD GUARDIAN
9. SHANG LAO = SHAPE SHIFTER / ANTAGONIST
10. KITSUNE = HERALD

500 YEARS AGO

SHANG LAO CORRUPTS THE SHAOLIN AFTER GONGORO BECOMES CHAMPION. LEO OF DEAD WARRIORS TO STAY IMMORTAL HIS GODS,

SHANG LAO'S GODS WANT TO IN THEY USE THE TOURNAMENT TO FURIES. WHEN EARTH'S REAL LAO'S GODS CAN STEP THE GATES.

SHANG LAO'S ISLAND IS THE GATEWAY,

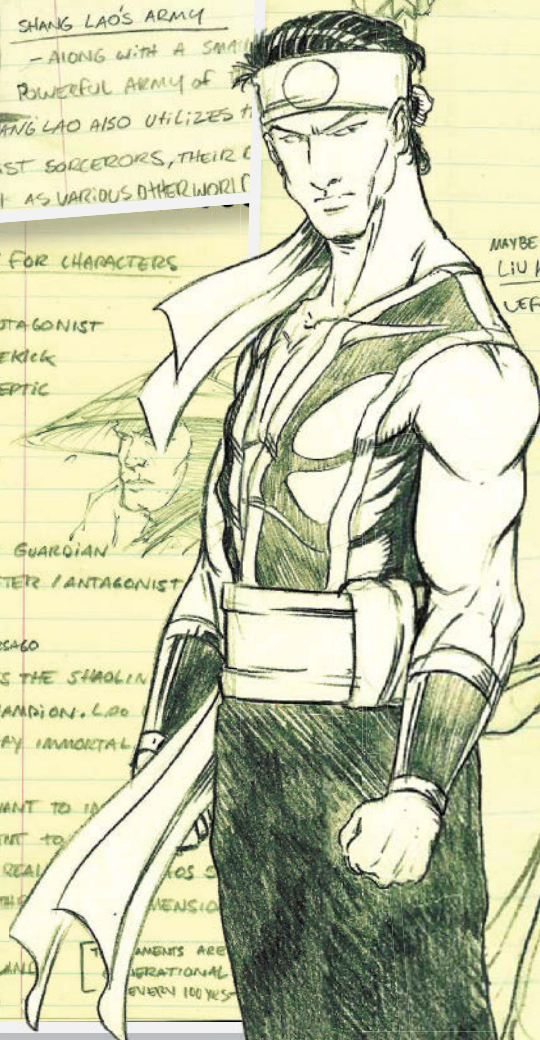
KITSUNE: SHANG LAO'S PRINCESS DAUGHTER BETRAYS LAO WHEN SHE FALLS FOR KANO.

BACKGROUND (NON-PLAYABLE?)

* PALETTE SWAP FOR 2 NINJAS. A HUNTER AND THE HUNTED OR ONE IS RUNNING AWAY FROM CHAN.

MAYBE RIVAL CIANS, REVENGE STORY?

MAYBE LIU KANG AS RENEGADE MONK. LEFT TEMPLE ETC.



WHAT THEY SAID...



Genesis gamers will be more than happy with their version of the arcade classic. Until Street Fighter II makes its appearance on the Genesis scene, Mortal Kombat's clearly the king of the Genesis beat-'em-up hill

GamePro, September 1993

"At the time, there were maybe a dozen people in the videogame department," Tobias remembers. "We were like the bastard children of a company that cherished its pinball game division. Our department was in a set of offices in the back of the pinball manufacturing plant. I loved walking through the factory in the morning. It demonstrated the reality of the arcade business, which outside of design and software was this beast of mechanical engineering and industry." And it was during these early days that Tobias worked with Mark Turmell and Robotron creator Eugene Jarvis on *Smash TV*.

"Both of those guys were huge influences on me in terms of their work ethic and passion for games," Tobias reminisces. "Eugene was like a god of the industry, although he never carried himself that way. He always made himself accessible, which was very generous considering I was a 19 year-old kid. The department was so small that management gave us creative freedom to do whatever we wanted and they obviously had plenty of faith in guys like Mark and Eugene. I think that freedom played a large part in the department's success."

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of *Smash TV*, the foundations of *Mortal Kombat* began to take shape as Tobias started experimenting with the digitising capabilities of the company's development hardware. "Up until that point everything I had done was hand drawn and animated," Tobias reflects. "I thought the larger we could get the characters on screen, the more we could take advantage of digitization. So a fighting game, which would only require two characters on screen, immediately came to mind. I approached Ed Boon [*Mortal Kombat* co-creator, currently at NetherRealm Studios] and he was interested in doing a fighting game as well."

This idea went on to become one of the most gratuitously violent and yet undeniably compelling games of its generation. But if it wasn't for the unavailability of a certain Belgian action hero, *Mortal Kombat* might've been entirely different. "We thought about getting a Hollywood martial artist involved," Tobias recalls, "and I think the company had been contacted regarding the *Universal Soldier* film. We were interested in Van Damme as a martial-arts star who could portray either himself or a character in our game. It didn't pan out for whatever reason, and never got beyond a few phone calls between our licensing guy and Van Damme's agent."

PLAYERS COULD LOOK AT THE CHARACTERS AND UNDERSTAND THE ARCHETYPES

But despite missing out on a different kind of blood sport, the cause for an unlicensed fighting game was given sudden validity with the meteoric rise of the dragon punch. "*Street Fighter II* released and was doing extremely well in arcades," Tobias says. "That was our proof-of-concept because, prior to that, fighting games had only seen limited success. We didn't actually start on *Mortal Kombat* until after Ed and I had finished our prior projects, but I believe we started actual game development around October 1991. We went out for location tests around May 1992 with the finished product shipping August of that year."

What followed was nothing less than a landmark moment as arcade gamers across the globe began to spread

the word about Kano, Sonya and the technicolour ninjas. "I looked at the design and creation of the original characters as being a part of the storytelling process," Tobias explains. "I used archetypes to define that first group of characters. Liu Kang was our hero and Johnny Cage was the sidekick. I never had a place to articulate any of that with exposition, but I think the players were able to look at those characters and understand the archetypes almost on a subconscious level."

And even if they didn't, it was clear that *Mortal Kombat* was tapping into a filmic style that lay somewhere between classic kung-fu and blood-soaked horror. "There wasn't a whole lot of conceptual art work done back then," Tobias describes. "I had a couple of notebooks I kept with



JOHN TOBIAS
Design and graphics





sketches and story. There were a few ideas that we never pursued. One was a brutish character called Rokuro, which is the name of a mountain demon in Japanese mythology. Another was a character called Kitsune, who we cut from the original but brought back in *Mortal Kombat 2* as Kitana."

The original *Mortal Kombat* was set entirely on Earth with the seven fighters competing in a tournament held by Shang Tsung. It wasn't until the sequels that Tobias and the team expanded the universe to include the hellish Netherrealm, the otherworldly Outworld and the savage demigod himself, Shao Khan. Each fighter's story was fleshed out with a few words and a static image – which in Raiden's case, portrayed him as a warmongering tyrant. This was totally at odds with the benevolent God of Thunder that fought to save humanity in the numerous sequels that followed.

■■■■ "I ALWAYS LOOKED at the endings in *Mortal Kombat* as outlandish 'what if?' scenarios," Tobias explains wistfully. "I never considered them as part of the story's canon. Raiden's ending, in particular, built on the source of his character – which was this god called Raijin who was a trickster-type character in Japanese mythology. Our Raiden turned into our own thing as he became more of a mentor in the later games. But the story from *Mortal Kombat* changed very little from its inception. There was always an island gateway to another realm and a tournament with a nefarious host beholden to gods from another realm."

As the series grew and its fictional realms continued to diversify, the roster expanded to include a demonic centaur, ninja cyborgs and a mutant with retractable wrist-blades. But out of all the surprises that Tobias cooked up, the 2,000 year-old half-dragon that acted as *Mortal Kombat*'s unthrowable sub-boss was by far the most memorable. "Goro was inspired by the stop-motion in Ray Harryhausen films like *Jason And The Argonauts*," Tobias confirms. "That was Goro's initial inspiration in terms how to get a more fantastical looking character on-screen in **CONTINUED >**

BEHIND THE SCENES OF MORTAL KOMBAT

■ As well as challenging you to one-on-one showdowns with the other fighters and your mirror image, the game also featured endurance matches where you fought two opponents back-to-back with one health bar. It was good training for the bosses.



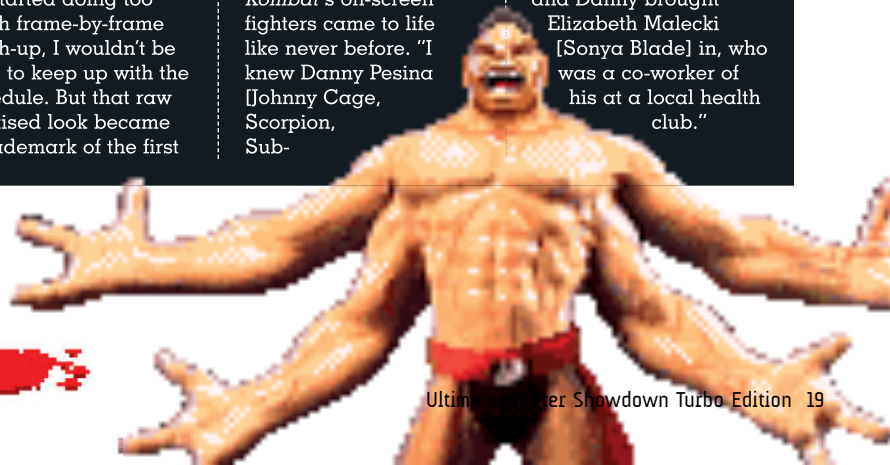
Switching to Digital

■ "ONE DECISION I made early in development was to let the qualities of captured video dictate the look of the game," Tobias explains when asked about the decision to use digitised sprites rather than hand-drawn graphics. "That was due to the project's schedule and the fact that I was the sole artist responsible. I knew that if I started doing too much frame-by-frame touch-up, I wouldn't be able to keep up with the schedule. But that raw digitised look became a trademark of the first

game. It's funny to look at game graphics today in terms of the tools and limitations, and then to look back at just how primitive it was back when I started."

Mortal Kombat wasn't the first fighting game to feature digitised sprites, as that honour goes to Atari's *Pit-Fighter*. But by employing five actors with a background in martial arts, *Mortal Kombat*'s on-screen fighters came to life like never before. "I knew Danny Pesina [Johnny Cage, Scorpion, Sub-

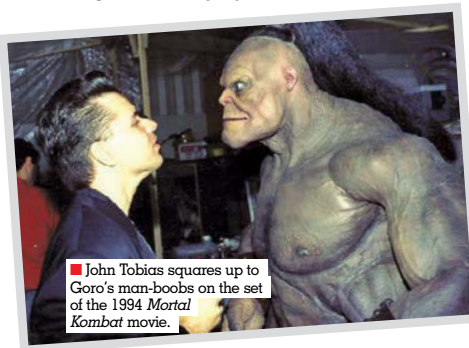
Zero], Carlos Pesina [Raiden], and Richard Divizio [Kano] through a mutual friend since our high school days," says Tobias. "Danny was a very talented Wushu practitioner and was friends with Ho-Sung Pak [Liu Kang, Shang Tsung], who I believe was a Wushu Grand Nationals champion. We were also looking for an athletic blonde actress and Danny brought Elizabeth Malecki [Sonya Blade] in, who was a co-worker of his at a local health club."



■ "Ed played the most so he was probably the best," Tobias admits. "I think I won the most with either Sub-Zero or Scorpion."



■ Every character has two or three special moves, which cover projectiles like Sub-Zero's Ice Freeze and instant punishers like Raiden's Torpedo. Our favourite, however, has to be Sonya's blockbusting Leg Grab.



■ John Tobias squares up to Goro's man-boobs on the set of the 1994 *Mortal Kombat* movie.

digitised form. Curt Chiarelli was the talented sculptor who brought Goro to life. I knew him through a mutual friend and he did a great job for us."

But as punishingly hard as the four-armed Shokan warrior was, the most vexing opponent in *Mortal Kombat* was undoubtedly Reptile – as you had to perform a Double Flawless Victory on The Pit stage before you could face him. "The hidden character idea originated with Ed," recalls Tobias when asked about the first secret character in a fighting game. "He loved fucking with the players that way. I remember thinking there was no way they were going to find all this stuff, but they found every bit of it. We were amazed because when you look at the circumstances the odds were just incredible."

And then, of course, there's the little matter of a soul-sucking sorcerer who could morph into every other character when you faced him in the final showdown. "I recently dug up one of my old notebooks and found a page that had archetypes attached to certain characters," Tobias describes while showing us some original sketches. "Shang Tsung was listed as 'shape-shifter'. We had memory issues and couldn't fit another epic boss in after Goro, so the idea of using all of the characters, which were already in memory, worked out great for us. Shang had a very limited set of animations that were mostly devoted to morphing between characters." Still, at least he couldn't regenerate his health.

Although *Mortal Kombat* was developed at a time when *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury* were already relieving arcade patrons of their loose change, Ed Boon designed a fighting system that was considerably different to the competition. For a start, all the characters shared the same movement speed, damage output and repertoire of standard attacks, with only signature moves like Sub-Zero's Ice Freeze projectile and Johnny Cage's ball-busting Split Punch separating them offensively. It was also the first fighting game to feature a dedicated block button and special moves – like Raiden's Torpedo dive – that used motion-only inputs.

■ ■ ■ BUT ACCORDING TO Tobias, the five-button layout wasn't something they had in place from the start. "As I recall," Tobias says,

"very early in development we had six punch and kick buttons – high, middle, and low. But we cut the middle button out because it was kind of redundant, and also because it helped us cut out some frames of animation that would've been required because of it." This was a sensible decision given the tight timeframe the team had to work with, but we can't help but wonder what a six-button *Mortal Kombat* might've played like.

Arranging the buttons in a cross pattern isn't the limit of *Mortal Kombat*'s innovations either, as similarly to how *Street Fighter II* inadvertently created the combo system, Boon and Tobias pretty much paved the way for *Tekken* by inventing the concept of juggles. "I recall juggling happening by accident," Tobias explains. "But once it was discovered, Ed took advantage of it and tweaked

EARLY IN DEVELOPMENT WE HAD SIX PUNCH AND KICK BUTTONS – HIGH, MIDDLE AND LOW

it from that point forward. It was purely his brainchild." It also had the unfortunate consequence of unbalancing the game, as certain juggle combos could kill a character at full health.

Fortunately, these touch-of-death combos were mitigated with subsequent revisions that tweaked various aspects of the game before *Mortal Kombat II* was completed. Reptile, for instance, was added in Version 3, while players were only able to play against the same character from Version 2 onwards. The Test Your Might board breaking, meanwhile, was a permanent fixture from Version 0.9 on. "I'd worked on a similar minigame in *Total Carnage* where the player had to repeatedly whack a button to survive an electric chair," Tobias enthuses. "The one in *Street Fighter* served the same kind of purpose, which was just to give the player a break from the one-on-one battles. We wisely cut these sequences in the later games."

One thing that's never been cut from any *Mortal Kombat* to date, however, is the barbaric Fatality executions. The original wasn't the first fighting game to have coups de grâce – that honour goes to

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Street Fighter II > Mortal Kombat > Thrill Kill



Like most fighting games released in the Nineties, *Mortal Kombat* owes a debt to *Street Fighter II* for paving the road ahead of it.



Thrill Kill tried to out-do *Mortal Kombat* in the violence stakes. It never saw release, but its engine was used to make *Wu-Tang: Taste The Pain*.





■ A 'Mortal Monday' advertising campaign was used by Acclaim in 1993 to promote the release of *Mortal Kombat* on the Mega Drive, SNES, Game Boy and Game Gear. The SNES had better graphics while the Mega Drive version retained the gore factor via a cheat code.

Barbarian on Commodore 64 – but while *Barbarian* was content with straight-up decapitations, *Mortal Kombat* featured invasive heart surgery and spine splitters. "There was this anticlimactic moment at the end of a match that just felt like something was missing," Tobias explains when asked about the origin of the iconic death blows. "That's where the idea started. We never really censored ourselves, we just thought about how to get positive reactions out of the player."

■■■■ IN THIS SENSE, the Fatality system succeeded, as no match was truly finished unless the winning player despatched their opponent in over-the-top fashion. But after various hearings on 'videogame violence and the corruption of society' – headed up by US Senator Joseph Lieberman after the release of *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap* – the ESRB was established in 1994. "When we designed the original arcade product, I believe our demographic was players in their late teens or early twenties," Tobias states of the ensuing controversy. "We never thought of our players as children. I think that changed when the games were ported to the home consoles, and so I believe the rating system was entirely appropriate."

It's clear that the team's primary focus was to make a fun and memorable fighting game that didn't take itself too seriously, and by all accounts *Mortal Kombat* was exactly that. Tobias even used his experience working for the now defunct NOW

Comics and Eternity Comics to write and illustrate a *Mortal Kombat: Collector's Edition* comic book that was advertised during the arcade game's attract mode for \$3 by mail-order. "The comic was my idea and it came from this desire to tell a story, which couldn't be told in the game itself," he says with a smile. "I believe we sold at least a few thousand of them."

Tobias left Midway in 1999 during the development of *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces* and now does industry consulting work. He also illustrated a 16-page comic book that was included with the Collector's Edition of *Mortal Kombat Vs. DC Universe*. "I like how they've altered the original character designs in both *DC Universe* and *Mortal Kombat 9*," Tobias reflects when asked about the recent reboot. "I think they really turned a corner in terms of quality and staying true to the original designs. When redesigning is done for no reason other than change for change's sake, you can lose the qualities which made a character special from its inception."

This is a sentiment that sums up *Mortal Kombat* really well; regardless of where the sequels have taken the series over the years, the original still holds up as one of the most compelling fighting games of its generation. And although everyone remembers it for the haunting words of 'Finish Him!!', underneath all the buckets of blood is a game full of intrigue and mystery. "One of the most interesting things that nobody

else knows is what Raiden and Liu Kang are really shouting during their attacks,"

Tobias teases, "but I can't tell you what those are." So even with its 20th anniversary rapidly approaching, it seems *Mortal Kombat* still harbours some sordid secrets. 

CENTRE STAGE

■ *MORTAL KOMBAT* featured six memorable stages that included the Warrior Shrine with its row of statues; the Throne Room where Shang Tsung watched from his lofty perch; the Courtyard where *Mortal Kombat* background designer John Vogel provided the animations for the masked guards; and the infamous Pit that let you pull off a Stage Fatality with a crafty uppercut that plunged the opponent onto the spikes below. The bottom of the Pit even doubled up as a secret seventh stage where you could fight the elusive Reptile.

"The inspirations for the backgrounds simply drew from the setting of a tournament on a mystical island," Tobias remembers. "Most of our memory was allocated for the characters and their animations so we did what we could with the backgrounds. Some of them were created using pieces of others. I don't think there were any concepts that were left undone." Then as the series progressed, we got to see everything from pools of acid to man-eating trees.



■ Play through the single-player and you can Test Your Might against blocks of wood, stone and steel. But only by competing against other players will you get to see ruby and diamond.

CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports under the spotlight

MORTAL KOMBAT

ORIGINAL RELEASE **Board:** Midway Y Unit Hardware **Year:** 1992 **Publisher:** Midway **Developer:** In-house



THE FIRST legitimate challenger to *Street Fighter II*, *Mortal Kombat*'s comic violence, digitised fighters, outlandish plot and gruesome moves saw it become an equal Nineties beat-'em-up phenomenon, spawning action figures, comic books, two animated television series, three movies, various spin-off games and a theatrical stage show that nobody saw. Given its popularity, it should come as no surprise that it was ported to pretty much every format at the time, and as a result it received no shortage of less-than-flawless home ports.

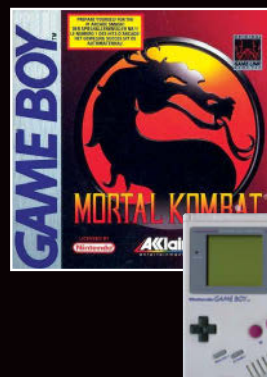
To adhere to Nintendo's strong family-friendly attitude at the time, the Super Nintendo version famously switched out the blood in the game for something that resembled grey sweat, and censored a large portion of the gruesome content too, even re-branding the game's famous Fatalities to the more affable-

sounding 'Finishing Bonus'. While Amiga owners got the gore, they had to endure frequent disk changing, lengthy loading times between bouts, and the game's entire combat system being assigned to a joystick and a single fire button. The most disappointing port, though, was the dramatically pared down version on the Game Boy, although it must be said: was anyone that surprised it was utter rubbish?

As you might imagine, expecting the Game Boy to throw digitised sprites around the screen with any kind of conviction was stretching its powers by a considerable margin. While Nintendo's portable might have done a convincing job in rendering fighters that looked like their coin-op counterparts, things started to break down when it came to the fighting. Performing basic moves with precision was impossible, owing to the game's

terribly sluggish animation, as well as the handheld's small, fiddly D-pad and limited buttons. And you can probably already picture the issues that arose from trying to quickly tap in the inputs to pull off special moves and Fatalities. To make things worse, the traditional commands for some attacks were inexplicably altered from their original form too, further frustrating those familiar with the coin-op.

The final insult came from this port being entirely sanitised, with the more gruesome Fatalities swapped out for something pathetic - Kano's signature finisher, which sees him punch through the chest of his opponent to produce their still-beating heart, became a simple kick, while Sub-Zero was given nothing more than a wimpy punch. With an already rigid-feeling fighting game simply made to feel even more unwieldy, and much of its character stripped away, this was perhaps one conversion too far for *Mortal Kombat*.



SYSTEM FAILURE

Format: Game Boy
Year: 1993
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Probe
Entertainment Ltd



HEAD TO HEAD





THE BREAKDOWN

1 This conversion isn't just missing blood and guts, but also one of the main characters. Johnny Cage is strangely absent from the Game Boy port. We suspect this was either due to a lack of memory, or the actor who portrayed him having a good agent.

2 Partially making up for the shoddiness of this conversion, and making this port unique over all others, Goro is a secret playable character, unlocked by inputting a special code after the end credits. It's probably the only remarkable aspect of this entire port.

3 *Mortal Kombat* isn't exactly known for having fluid and deep combat, but the gameplay in this port is bad to the point of making the game look as if it's running on a pocket calculator. The controls were also awkward and unresponsive, which didn't bode well for pulling off Fatalities.



WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED IT ON

Format: Mega Drive Year: 1993 Publisher: Arena
Developer: Probe Entertainment Ltd



Back in the day, the version to play was the Mega Drive port. Though it too censored out the gallons of spilled blood, a well-known cheat code soon sorted the issue, retaining all the red stuff and fatalities, and making Mega Drive owners the smuggest kids in the playground.



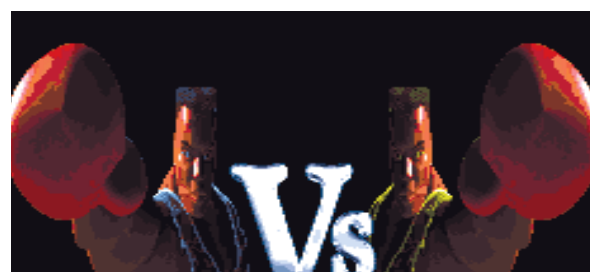
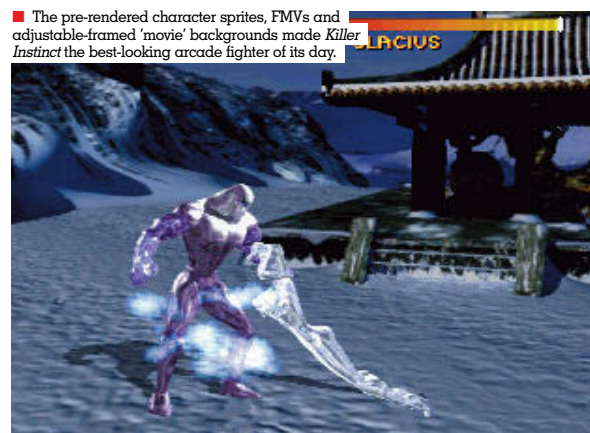
BEHIND THE SCENES

KILLER INSTINCT

From 64-bit arcade powerhouse to 16-bit console conversion, the making of Killer Instinct was very tough indeed. And that's before you consider the fact that it had to compete with Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat



■ The pre-rendered character sprites, FMVs and adjustable-framed 'movie' backgrounds made *Killer Instinct* the best-looking arcade fighter of its day.



THE CHARACTERS WERE MADE MORE FANTASTICAL TO MAKE THE GAME STAND OUT



Released: 1994 (Arcade)/
1995 (SNES)

Format: Arcade/SNES

Publisher: Midway (Arcade)/
Nintendo (SNES)

Developer: Rare

KEY STAFF:

Chris Tilston

Lead Designer/Programmer

Mark Betteridge

Head Programmer/Lead Designer

Kevin Bayliss

Character Designer

Chris Stamper

Hardware Designer

■ **RARE. TO A GAMER** that name means quality. To an English gamer it means 'One of our flagship claims to the world's gaming industry', such is the acclaim that the company from Twycross, Leicestershire, has earned over the years. It has consistently delivered games of the highest calibre. Be it the 1984 release of *Sabre Wulf*, the 1997 FPS legend that is *GoldenEye*, or the upcoming platformer *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*. Yet there was a time, when the company's future was in doubt. When the Stamper brothers sold Ultimate Play The Game back in 1985, and abandoned the Spectrum – a platform they had set alight within their first three years as a company – to take on the new and then un-proven Famicom, fans were left shaking their heads. Faced with an unlimited budget from Nintendo and tasked with developing games back home on a system few British people could even afford, Rare got into the business of licensed games and ports.

Though the constant string of NES releases brought in huge profits, Rare had lost its innovation and was in danger of becoming just another developer. Its best chance of breaking the mould and keeping ahead of the game lay in 16-bit consoles. If Rare wanted to win big, it had to risk big. And so it was that the company cut back its production and exchanged the massive profit it had garnered from the NES into the production of Silicon Graphics workstations. This move made Rare the most technologically advanced developer in the UK, but what would it do with this newfound power?

"It was the golden age of fighting games," says Chris Tilston, gameplay programmer and lead designer on *Killer Instinct*. "They were more popular at that time in the arcades than they had **CONTINUED >**



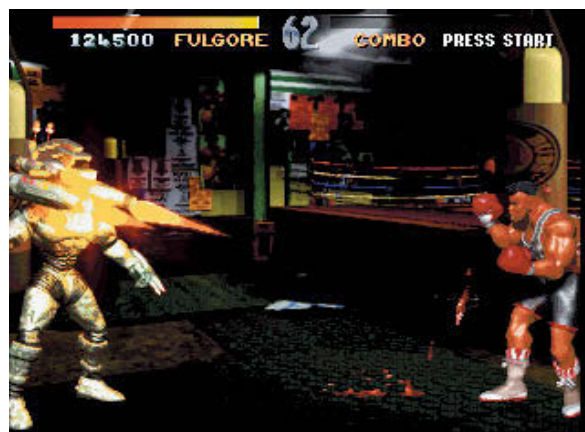
BEHIND THE SCENES KILLER INSTINCT



■ *Killer Instinct's* characters are arguably the most unique part of the game and the chief reason for its success. A hot woman performing a 48-hit Ultra Combo with legs flailing everywhere. Er... Yes please.



■ *Killer Instinct* took *Mortal Kombat's* Fatalities and, by some miracle, managed to make them even more stupid. Death by pixelated breasts. Let that be a lesson to you.



■ "U-L-T-R-A-C-O-M-B-O!" one of arcade gaming's greatest thrills.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
THE DUDE

▲ I loved *Killer Instinct*. I got pretty good at it down at the local flea pit as well. I would love to see a new version.

Posted by:
PAL VERSION

▲ I remember pulling off one of those multi-hit combo-type finishing moves against a mate. It was his game and he couldn't believe that I managed it. It was a complete fluke, too, as I was just mashing the buttons.

Posted by:
DEXTERKX

▲ Looking back, it seemed to me that it was remorselessly sponging off the popularity of *Mortal Kombat* with similar sprites and similar design principles. Looking closer, it did actually experiment with a lot of different mechanics – automatic/ultra combos and combo breakers for example – as well as more complex inputs and specials, which gave it considerably more depth than *Mortal Kombat*. Unfortunately, I wasn't all that concerned with depth when I was ten.

Posted by:
RADIOFLOYD

▲ I like the *Sabre Wulf* character or whatever his name was, and the guy who could make himself slide along the ground like some kind of liquid.

Posted by:
SOMERSET BUMPKIN

▲ It was the only arcade machine that my brother and I would rush up to like barracuda to a shiny knife. There was just something about the characters – they were unreal back in the early-Nineties. I can't really remember how it played, but that wasn't important.

Production Values

■ THE MORTAL KOMBAT and *Street Fighter* series, upon which the early beat-'em-up battle was fought, are undoubtedly two of the most famous gaming franchises ever. Naturally, having to tear the two apart to enter the battle required something a little special. Thankfully, Rare was more than willing to put its money where its mouth was. A technological powerhouse, *Killer Instinct* was the first arcade game to use an internal hard disk drive, with a Risc R4600 processor running at 100MHz, giving access to graphics far and beyond those of *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* at the time. Alongside the Silicon Graphics-created pre-rendered character sprites and adjustable 'movie' backgrounds, *Killer Instinct* set the arcade screens ablaze in what was a gamer's dream at the time. Not only were the graphics sublime, but the soundtrack, *Killer Cuts*, was also of such a high-quality mix of up-tempo electronica that it merited a commercial CD album release. Needless to say, Rare threw everything behind *Killer Instinct*'s production that it possibly could. To this day it remains one of the highest-quality arcade productions in the industry's history.



■ The beastly Eyedol's ability to wipe out an entire energy bar with a single combo made him one tough boss. If you made it to this screen on a single credit in the arcade, let it be known that you are a legend.



■ ever been, and we were all big fans. It just made sense to enter this market with what people were playing most." And therein lay the main competition for all beat-'em-ups at the time.

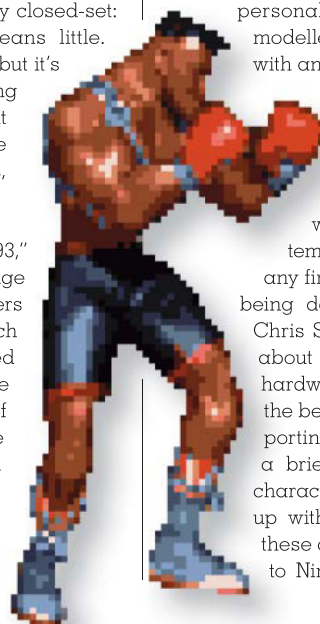
Although *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat* had brought unprecedented popularity to the genre, they had also set the basis for all that was to come. As a whole string of titles proved, differentiating a game from the two giants was far from easy. Whereas other genres benefit from the numerous ways in which they can distinguish themselves, the beat-'em-up is incredibly closed-set: story means nothing, environment means little. Great gameplay is essential, of course, but it's difficult to market a game on something so intangible. If there is one element of the beat-'em-up genre that can be communicated easily it is the characters, so that's where Rare began.

■ ■ ■ "A prototype started back in June 1993," explains Tilston, "when Mark Betteridge [now studio head] had a couple of boxers [one of which became TJ Combo], which lead artist Kevin Bayliss had modelled on screen, running on Rare's old arcade hardware. Initially the theme was one of 'street punks', where the characters were more based in reality – a basketball player, for example – but we changed this to more fantastical characters that would make the game stand out. Things that might have been familiar

THE PRODUCTION PHASE STARTED IN MID-APRIL AND WE HAD TO BE DONE BY OCTOBER

but you hadn't seen before in the context of a fighting game, grounded by some more traditional characters." By Christmas the game's personalities had been designed and modelled, and animation tests had begun with an early motion-capture system.

Being such a transitional period in Rare's evolution, the team were limited to working on old hardware. As Tilston states: "The archaic motion-capture suit was joined by wires and was a bit temperamental, and we didn't even have any final hardware to work off – it was still being designed." Thankfully, Rare founder Chris Stamper, who had "Raised eyebrows about the fact that he was designing the hardware", produced the first prototype at the beginning of 1994, and the team began porting the engine over. "We put together a brief presentation doc with all of the characters Kevin had modelled, and came up with the theme that would glue all of these characters together. This was sent off to Nintendo who greenlighted the game,



wanting it to appear on their new 'Ultra 64' hardware but also agreeing that it would go into arcades first.

"The name at this time was *Brute Force*, which we didn't go with because someone had the trademarks on a *Brute Force* clothing line. The final theme – and the name *Killer Instinct* – came along a short while later when we tried to glue all of these diverse characters together in a setting that could be slightly more believable. In March, more pieces of hardware appeared and I started putting in the moves we had motion captured and rendered out as sprites into the game. We also got a few more people at this time, almost trebling the team size from three to eight, and were introduced to Ken Lobb [of recent *Crackdown* and *Gears Of War* fame], who then worked at Nintendo. A fighting game maniac, he would visit often to try out the game and pummel us with great ideas. The production phase started for real in mid-April and we had to hit our stride pretty quickly as I think we had to be done by October."

■■■ *Killer Instinct* was released into the arcades, with a boom in October 1994. Where Rare's production values had always been of the highest standard, *Killer Instinct* was something else. Its technical mastery drowned out every other arcade game around. Be it the electronica opening theme, the booming voiceover yelling 'Ultra Combo' or Fulgore's gun-turret-head finisher going off like a drive-by shooting, the cabinet seemed to ignite the arcades. Rare had hit the hardware jackpot. "We could do a lot with the hardware that others couldn't," says Tilston. "The hard drive allowed us to stream in lots of different frames for the background and give them this sense of depth that you hadn't seen from the usual way of doing backgrounds. The silicon graphics technology of rendering a model that had been ray-traced inside Maya gave us the unique look for our characters, and although the CPU didn't have any custom 3D hardware, it was powerful enough to render some basic polygon geometry for the three-dimensional arenas, although probably not powerful enough to do full 3D-textured characters." When it came to visuals, Rare's *Killer Instinct* hadn't just raised the bar, it had launched it into the stratosphere, elevating its presentation far beyond that of the competition. But could Rare achieve the same sort of success with the gameplay? Something that couldn't be improved with an endless supply of expensive hardware.

■ "Available in your home in 1995, only on Nintendo Ultra 64." Though wrong, truly words to make a hardcore gaming fan salivate at the mouth.



As Tilston comments: "We borrowed a bit from [*Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*] but always tried to take things in a different direction. We looked at *Street Fighter* and saw that it had this emergent system where you could pull off these strings of moves, but this was so difficult that only a fraction of the player base could do it, so we wanted to come up with something that was more accessible to a wider audience. And of course death moves were all the rage then thanks to *Mortal Kombat*, so we put in our version of them."

This isn't to say that *Killer Instinct* didn't bring something of its own to the genre. In **CONTINUED >**.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

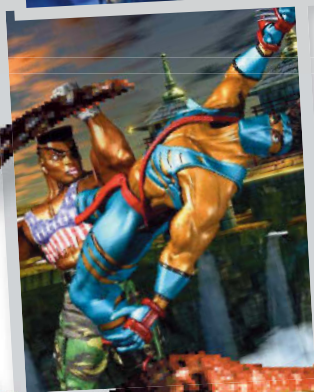
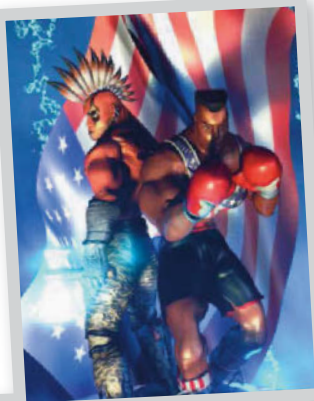


One of *Killer Instinct*'s main influences was *Street Fighter II*. Obviously. The stringing of moves was simplified to make KI combos.



Mortal Kombat 3 was, in turn, influenced by KI, using a combo system with text stating the number of hits and damage percentage.





■ Why isn't *Killer Instinct* available on Xbox Live Arcade yet? Riptor wants to know right now.

fact, it is difficult to name a 2D fighter that garnered the commercial success of *Killer Instinct* while deviating so much from the formula. Its Ultra Combos, accessible yet incredibly stylish stringing technique, three-dimensional backgrounds, Humiliations, No mercys, and its unique characters all stood it apart – according to Tilston, this is what kept them hooked. “We could see from weekly arcade reports how commercially successful the game was becoming,” Tilston remembers. “Although the *Killer Instinct* arcade machine was highly expensive for the time, in some arcades a single cabinet would take over a thousand dollars a week. It wasn't long before the machines had paid for themselves... and that popularity continued for a long time.”

■ Creating the arcade version of *Killer Instinct* had been an arduous and chancy gamble, but porting it to the console market was an even riskier venture. Had the arcade game's introduction ‘Available for your home in 1995, only on Nintendo Ultra 64’, been accurate, life may have been much easier, but when Nintendo announced that the then Ultra 64 was to be put back until September 1996, Rare had a major dilemma. The arcade's success had ignited demand in a console version, but having to move the port of one of the most advanced arcade games around from a 64-bit system to a 16-bit machine that was rapidly going out of date, was a technological nightmare. “Memory was the big issue,” remarks Tilston, “and the multi-frame backgrounds and 3D backgrounds had to go. The other difficult part I remember was cramming all of the moves in. We had to take out 80 per cent of the frames that made up a single move and borrow



■ Unfortunately, SNES memory issues turned the ultra-slick graphics of the arcade version of *Killer Instinct* into rather dated clumps of pixels on home machines.



A SINGLE KILLER INSTINCT ARCADE CABINET COULD TAKE OVER \$1,000 A WEEK

from other places. It took both me and Kevin about four months of solid work, going through frames and cutting them down while trying to keep moves vaguely resembling the originals.” Needless to say, the changes were more than apparent.

The motion-captured, flawlessly smooth moves of the arcade version became choppy and fractured, the characters blocky and the backgrounds no longer 3D. What had far surpassed any other beat-'em-up for graphics and sound in the arcade, at home – against the newly released PlayStation – suddenly looked dated. This placed all the attention and any chance of *Killer Instinct*'s success at home on the gameplay. It is testament to the game's design that, despite its problems, the SNES version of *Killer Instinct* received critical acclaim and featured in *Nintendo Power*'s Top 200 Games On A Nintendo Console list. “That's surprising,” comments Tilston, “as I honestly don't think we ever did nail a definitive home version of the arcade *Killer Instinct*. There never really was a one-to-one conversion due to the hardware limits of the home platforms.” So, what does Tilston attribute this success to? “Characters that players hadn't seen before is one reason. The graphical look is another. The ease with which you could pull off combos. And the music really helped give it this attitude. Maybe where *Mortal Kombat* was dark and *Street Fighter II* was cartoon, we were somewhere in the middle.”

The problems that Rare had suffered with the SNES port of *Killer Instinct* would once again surface with the N64 version of *Killer Instinct 2* (*Killer Instinct: Gold*). The arcade version was an absolute powerhouse. The speakers damn near collapsed the cabinet; the characters were beautifully

KILLER INSTINCT 3?

Rare keeps the series' fans guessing

■ GAME FANS know that rumours of *Killer Instinct 3* have been spreading like wildfire all over the internet, and it's no surprise that the vast number of fans – who were thrilled with the arcade releases only to be twice disappointed with the home versions – are optimistically leaping at the ‘news’. Such a demand for a new instalment of the series has been stimulated that petitiononline.com now holds a list of the names of more than 2,400 fans demanding that Rare

should create the game. In return, Rare's response has done much to quench the fire while always keeping the door open to the idea. The rumours are certainly not without evidence. A recent issue of *Xbox World 360* magazine finished its Next Month section by saying: “And a killer secret game. Let's just say it's a biggie, a reinvention of a classic.” Add to this the fact that the specialist games press received a 2007 Christmas card from Rare with ‘Kl3’ written on

the stocking; the sheet music that was supposedly sent to Rare fan site MundoRare of *Killer Instinct 3*'s theme tune; and, above all, the fact that Rare has confirmed that it began work on the title years ago and never outright denied the game's existence, and you have a very interesting possibility. Of course, we won't know for certain until Rare finally confirms or denies the project absolutely, but it's still more than enough reason to get a little excited.

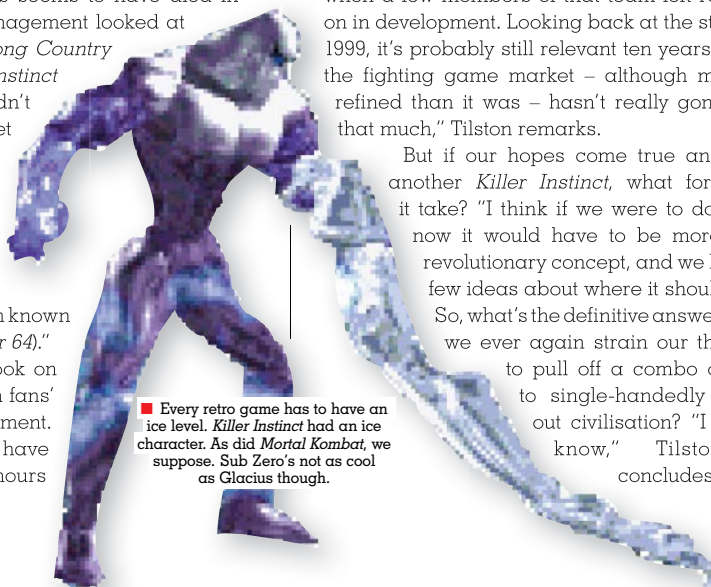


■ Though *Killer Instinct 2* didn't captivate the arcade audiences like its predecessor, the new characters and combos made it more than worthy of a few credits.

rendered, their moves seamlessly smooth; and the FMV sequences that were your reward for 'special' victories were slick and stylish. Fans pleaded that this conversion would give them the perfect port they had so longed for. Sadly, history repeated itself. Gone were the FMV sequences on N64, the characters were blocky, the moves often disjointed, and the audio lacked oomph. All this left a sour taste in the mouths of fans wanting a definitive home version. Hope turned to a third outing.

■■■ For any *Killer Instinct* fan, the fact that the series seems to have finished after its second outing is something of a sore point. Where *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* have put out more than enough versions of themselves to make the average fan penniless, Rare's series seems to have died in its infancy. "I think management looked at the sales of *Donkey Kong Country* [9 million] and *Killer Instinct* [3.2 million] and just didn't want to go after a market that was a third of the size of the platform game market," Tilston explains. "This was probably why we started off on a 3D platformer [*Conker*, then known as *Twelve Tales: Conker 64*]."

Even now, a quick look on the internet will confirm fans' hunger for a third instalment. The past few months have been littered with rumours



■ Every retro game has to have an ice level. *Killer Instinct* had an ice character. As did *Mortal Kombat*, we suppose. Sub Zero's not as cool as Glacius though.

of leaked sheet music for the title theme and purported slips from Rare nodding to a sequel. With such a constant flow of pseudo-news it seems impossible to know the truth. The only certainty on the matter is that there is and always was a definite possibility of number three. "In early-1999 I did start designing *KI3* with a very small team," reveals Tilston. "This was more of an evolutionary game, and we did get a prototype going with Jago in full 3D with motion-captured moves [and running at 60fps]. We had the advantage of designing the game for a home audience rather than an arcade audience, so we were going to move it in a different direction rather than just include a few new characters and a different story. This was stopped when I had to move onto *Perfect Dark* to help lead the design when a few members of that team left really early on in development. Looking back at the stuff I did in 1999, it's probably still relevant ten years later, and the fighting game market – although much more refined than it was – hasn't really gone forward that much," Tilston remarks.

But if our hopes come true and there is another *Killer Instinct*, what form will it take? "I think if we were to do a *KI3* now it would have to be more of a revolutionary concept, and we have a few ideas about where it should go."

So, what's the definitive answer? Will we ever again strain our thumbs to pull off a combo of hits to single-handedly wipe out civilisation? "I don't know," Tilston concludes.



KILLER INSTINCT



What They Said...



All in all it's a good game with some flaws. It isn't as deep as *Street Fighter* or as well made as *MK II*, but it's in contention with those brawlers – maybe not a killer, but definitely a felon

GamePro
Volume 7 Issue 9





BEHIND THE SCENES

TEKKEN

With the latest in the world-renowned fighting franchise just weeks away, its long-term director, Katsuhiro Harada, discusses the popularity of the King Of Iron Fist Tournament



Released: 1994
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Namco
Developer: In-House

KEY STAFF:
Hajime Nakatani
 Producer
Katsuhiro Harada
 Director
Satoru Yamada
 Design Supervisor
Masamichi Abe
 Co-ordinator

■ **LP, RP, LP, LP, RP, RK, RK, LP, LK.** Some 15 years on, King's ten-hit remains burned into our brains where it will presumably stay for all time. Even though we've played an unfathomable number of fighters since *Tekken* burst onto the scene in 1994 and arriving on PlayStation a year later, we still vividly recall the reward of committing one of these strings to memory and using it to bust the faces of novices. As our unconventional introduction shows, we have the scars to prove it, and everything.

However, due to our passion for self-improvement, *Tekken* simply isn't one of the many classic games that can still claim to be relevant today. But just because Namco has gradually improved upon every single element of the original to the point where it's effectively redundant, does this mean that one of the keystones in the 3D fighting genre can just be forgotten? Of course not. While *Tekken* may have trailed Sega's pioneering work in the genre with the forgotten *Dark Edge* and, soon after, *Virtua Fighter*, Namco can very much take credit for its part in PlayStation's success and the rebirth of a genre. With the spectacularly popular series approaching its seventh incarnation, we spoke with director Katsuhiro Harada about his role in the birth and evolution of one of gaming's most revered franchises.

"At the time, Namco was developing a 2D fighting game called *Knuckleheads* but the company was really focusing on 3D technology," explains Harada. "So we thought about making a 3D fighting game so we could learn more about developing 3D character models. That's how we started." Namco took a rather different route from Sega in its character design, utilising rounded edges (well, as close to rounded as the technology of the time would allow) and Gouraud shading in a bid to make fighters appear more realistic than *Virtua Fighter*'s combatants and their razor-sharp edges. And while it would be some time before a beat-'em-up embraced full **CONTINUED >.**



■ King's wrestling arsenal showcases *Tekken*'s most impressive grapples and these have grown more and more ridiculous as the series has gone on.



VIRTUA FIGHTER WAS INFLUENTIAL. STREET FIGHTER WASN'T PART OF THE DECISION





KingGeorgeIs



■ While movesets are modest by today's standards, the diversity made *Tekken* feel far more substantial than most previous fighters.



Chica



Szech



Angkor



■ Finding a character's key moves proved a great way to beat weak opponents, but the heavy hits usually become predictable if you don't mix up your strategy enough.

FROM THE **FORUM**

Posted by:

EL-REIDO

▲ *Tekken* was the first game where I thought 'Wow! I can play an arcade game in my house'. Before that, there was always a gap between your SNES or Mega Drive and the games you went to the arcade to play. I bought a PlayStation for *Final Fantasy VII*, but the game I enjoyed playing most was *Tekken 2*. I soon realised that home consoles were going to overtake the arcade.

Posted by:

BLOODBATH MCGINTY

▲ Doing King's whirlwind throw on a knackered arcade stick in Prestatyn. Cost me about £5. Totally worth it.

Posted by:

MOOGLEPIES

▲ I remember borrowing a mag from a friend of mine and reading the *Tekken 2* review. He'd defaced the pages in blue pen with choice comments like "Good game. Oh yes it is a good game." I agree, but I missed playing *Galaga* in the loading screens. I got *Tekken 3* for Christmas and unlocked everything within 24 hours. Then I deleted my save and did it again for fun.

Posted by:

KEIRBOY

▲ I'd play long into the night at uni. Choosing Yoshimitsu, beating my opponent into submission, then stepping in to finish him off with a few complex button presses, and watching in horror as my character plunged his sword into his stomach and collapsed dead on the floor.

Posted by:

SNAGGLETOOTH

▲ I've put many hours into *Tekken*, mastering characters in each instalment and usually beating my friends (mashers) fighting on 1% to 150% health. People say *Soul Calibur* is the greater game. To me that is a mashers delight, unlike *Tekken* where practice is rewarded.



■ Securing a perfect victory remains as satisfying as it ever was, although we've never really understood why winning with just a sliver of energy left is deemed 'great' in the *Tekken* series. Nearly losing is far from great, after all.



Ten Of The Best

■ Another distinguishing feature that separates *Tekken* from its rivals are the crazy attack strings of which each character is capable. Everyone has several ten-hit strings that can be learned and employed at will, although it's important to know – especially when going up against better players – that, contrary to popular belief, these aren't strictly combos. A well-trained opponent will be able to start guarding between hits and even evade or counter and punish if they're quick enough. But as Harada points out, these strings were never intended for high-end play anyway, rather as a way to empower new players and help them put on a flashy show, something Namco has gone on to replicate with the *Soul Calibur* series. "These were for beginners. It was something that would make you stronger if you learn them, and it was also a feature that was easy to grasp yet exciting."

movement in three-dimensional space, *Tekken* was certainly a pioneer in this field. Moves like Yoshimitsu's spinning combos allowed slight Z-axis movement to drive home the fact that polygons were more than just a presentation tool; they would go on to change the genre entirely.

At the time, though, we're not sure the world would have been ready for the kind of freedom offered by the most recent *Virtua Fighters* and *Soul Caliburs* – it was mind-blowing enough to just see fights play out in three dimensions and this is a strength Namco played with the view-change feature. Cribbed from the popular racers of the time, this option allowed you to cycle through several different view options, all of which showed off the extra dimension *Tekken* had over its years' worth of competitors. Slightly impractical perhaps, but it was the perfect tool to emphasise the wow factor of the then-stunning 3D visuals and as such can only be lauded as an ingenious inclusion.

■ ■ ■ ■ SO, HOW MUCH influence did other fighters at the time have on *Tekken*'s origin story? Harada tells us of the importance of *Virtua Fighter* on the project. "Of course we studied the game a lot. It was quite influential," he reveals, although the kings of the 2D world apparently didn't nearly have so much of an impact. "*Street Fighter* wasn't really part of the decision – it's just the direction we chose. However, holding back to guard was something *Street Fighter* and other 2D fighting games had used, and it seemed like a natural way to do it so we adopted that element." This was one crucial difference between Namco's brawler and *Virtua Fighter*, which featured a dedicated button for guarding, as well as a single punch and kick button. In *Tekken*, fight fans



already had something far more familiar and natural, closer to the multi-button setups of so many classic 2D fighters yet with its own unique twist.

Rather than the existing standard of having a series of punches and kicks that ranged from light to heavy, Namco took the brave step of assigning a button to each limb. "The left-right punch combination felt really good with this setup," says Harada. "That influenced our decision to have a button for each limb."

While potentially confusing in theory, it's a wonderful mechanic in practice: if you see a character pull off a two-footed dive kick, you know immediately that its execution will involve both kick button and a direction, most likely forwards. This intuitive control scheme went on to make *Tekken* one of PlayStation's flagship titles, a brand without which the console's debut may not have fared as well as it did.

And what a coup for Sony it was to have Namco's arcade expertise available exclusively on PlayStation – *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer* represented an early statement of intent for the Sony machine to become the home arcade, and these two titles were only the beginning. Of course,

the System 11 arcade board was based on PlayStation technology, so did this have something to do with Namco's loyalty to the hot new console when it arrived on the scene? Harada confirms our suspicions. "The System 11 hardware was designed and developed with Sony. One aspect we struggled with was that we needed something faster and more stable than the CD drive that was on the PSX. We ended up going with a large capacity flash memory," he recalls. "Our collaboration with Sony on the development of the arcade board, and the ease of porting it to the PlayStation led to it being exclusive. Also, it wasn't possible to run *Tekken* on the Saturn with its 3D capabilities." And what, if anything, were the key differences between the home and coin-op machines? "The CD drive was dropped for flash memory. It also has twice the memory of the PSX," Harada tells us before explaining the problems faced in moving the fight from this more powerful cabinet into the living room. "We had a hard time with reading data quickly from a CD. We really had to think about the best methods of storing data, and the layout of the data on the disc."

But just as the thrill of simply being able to play games saw generations sitting through weeks if not months of cumulative tape and disc loading, *Tekken*'s fairly modest load times weren't going to put anyone off playing a fully featured arcade game in their homes. And while the first game sold fairly well off the back of being one of the first and most impressive beat-'em-ups to grace the PlayStation, its sequels really turned the ambitious fighter into a world-leading series. The first game really shows its age today, but both *Tekken 2* and *Tekken 3* remain immensely playable – a testament to the fact that both games were years ahead of

WHAT THEY SAID...



A pugilist's dream, *Tekken* is quite simply the finest game around. Unrivalled depth and playability. We score it nine but add more points anyway. It's the best.

Official UK PlayStation Magazine, Issue 2



their time in terms of quality. "We hoped it would be popular. However, the results were quite disappointing at first," Harada reveals. "The series only began to be popular with *Tekken 3* – it took over ten years to reach the point we're at now where the game is number one in the genre, selling over 34 million copies."

■ ■ ■ PART OF THE draw of the franchise is its interesting array of characters, the roster expanding with each new title and currently including over 50 characters past and present. Even the eight original fighters showcase a wonderful diversity – from the clunky robotic Jack and the strangely familiar martial artist Marshall Law to native American descendant Michelle Chang and jaguar-masked wrestler King, the roster manages to pretty much cover all bases even before the original sub-bosses (most of which are effectively palette swaps or combinations of existing characters) come into play. "Well, we didn't really use anyone in particular as a base," Harada attempts to convince us, but we've had enough virtual fights in our time to know that Lei versus Law is Jackie Chan versus Bruce Lee. "We did use a variety of sources for inspiration. We really focused on making the characters resemble the old style of Japanese comics: very defined and unique," he semi-concedes. "But if you look at the designs, you can see a lot of differences. We've never had any legal issues."

A great deal has changed since *Tekken* first punched its way on to the scene – the endless plains in which fights once took place have been replaced with fully destructible surroundings, which confine and dictate the pace of each fight, full three-dimensional movement allows blows to be deftly sidestepped and countered and characters today are infinitely more complex than they were first time round. King is the perfect example, lately seen sporting a rather confusing 22-strong branching selection of chain throws, when in the first game he didn't even have 22 moves in total. Recoveries and escapes thankfully join the fray too, bringing *Tekken* in line with today's more technical fighters. It has evolved to have more of an emphasis on juggles than most brawlers, finally establishing the unique niche within the genre that Namco started chiselling out 15 years ago.

And impressive as *Tekken* was back in its day, modern audiences are far more demanding. As the series progressed, Namco revolutionised what an arcade port should be, backing up arcade-perfect



■ According to Harada, Jinpachi, Heihachi's father, was originally intended for *Tekken 1*, but the team never got the chance to include him.

IT TOOK OVER TEN YEARS [FOR TEKKEN TO BECOME] NUMBER ONE IN THE GENRE

conversions of its best titles with stacks of bonus content that has made every *Tekken* title surprising in its own way. *Tekken Ball*, *Tekken Bowling*, *Tekken Force* and now character customisation – the developer constantly goes above and beyond the call of duty to ensure the player gets all the arcade greatness they bought into... and then some. With an Arcade History mode that features the original coin-op versions of the first three games, PlayStation 2 finale *Tekken 5* is the perfect way to discover, first hand, just how the series has evolved with each new release. It's a journey we embarked on only recently in preparation for *Tekken 6* and one we can't recommend highly enough, even if the frustrating, quarter-munching nature of the original's artificial intelligence nearly reduced us to tears on several occasions. Still, we remembered King's ten-hit. Go us.



>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Sega's *VF* laid the foundations of the 3D fighter, but *Tekken*'s ingenious control mechanic and use of 3D space made it the more progressive title.



Sega returns with a string of imaginative 3D titles of its own – the destructible environments in *Fighting Vipers* becoming a genre staple.



X-MEN VS. STREET FIGHTER
ARCADE [Capcom] 1996

■ From Goro to Gouki to Galactus, gigantic (and cheap) boss characters have long been a staple of the beat-'em-up genre, but they don't come much more filthy than Apocalypse. Too big to fit on the screen and capable of summoning a laser drone to ensure that he's hitting you even when he's not hitting you, most of the enormous villain's close-range blows are rubbish. But when he recoils back off the screen, y'all better be worried; his left arm morphing into an enormous drill, Apocalypse rushes across the screen, looking to literally screw you over. If it hits, one of your characters is probably dead. If you block it, one of your characters is probably dead. Honestly? The guy is a massive prick.





TE
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FREE PLAY

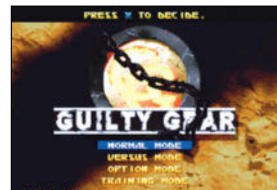
APOCALYPSE



BEHIND THE SCENES

GUILTY GEAR

Now a real force in the beat-'em-up field, it's hard to believe that Arc System Works' tentative first steps towards greatness happened over a decade ago. We chat to Daisuke Ishiwatari – who seemingly did more or less everything on the original Guilty Gear – about the birth and rise of a genuine contender to Capcom's fighting throne



Released: 1998
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: Arc System Works

KEY STAFF:

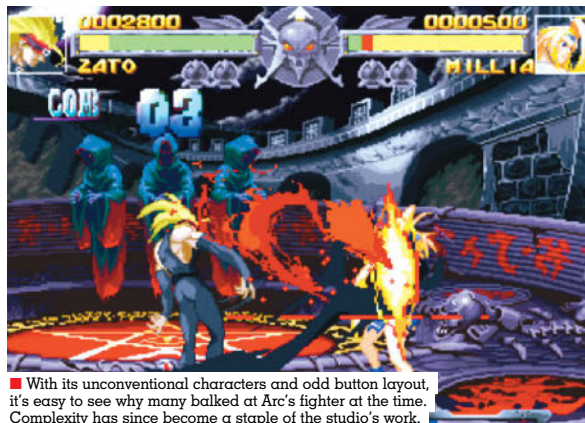
Daisuke Ishiwatari
Design/Production
Hideyuki Anbe
Programming



THE MISSING LINK. *Guilty Gear's* odd tagline may actually be referencing its frankly silly story – in which a cast of impossible characters enter a tournament to prove their strength before saving the world from the last bio-mechanical 'Gear', Testament and his equally cheap champion, Justice – but it's also just as good a metaphor for the game's placement in the fighting scene in general. With 3D fighters still a relative novelty, players were flocking to the Church Of Polygons and leaving behind the simpler world of sprite-based beat-'em-ups, but Arc's debut fight straddled both worlds. Though still very much a two-axis experience, *Guilty Gear* would go far beyond the complexity of any similar fighter that had come before, adding intricacies and elements to shame even the era's best 3D fighters (not to mention combos that made even *Tekken's* ten-strings look pedestrian) in the hope of reconverting a few lost souls. And while it might have worked to some minor extent, many were simply overwhelmed to the point that they struggled to get their head around the game or wrote it off altogether as trash.

Years ahead of its time in terms of mechanics, *Guilty Gear's* system is one that many today still don't fully understand. *Street Fighter Alpha* had built upon the perfect foundations of *Street Fighter II* and added all manner of super cancels, counters, and so forth, but Arc took things umpteen stages further in one go. Several different flavours of advanced guarding, complex ground and aerial strings that borrowed from *Darkstalkers* and

CONTINUED >



■ With its unconventional characters and odd button layout, it's easy to see why many balked at Arc's fighter at the time. Complexity has since become a staple of the studio's work.



WE CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE FIGHTING GAME SHOULD BE SOMETHING DIFFICULT





■ Dr Baldhead plays similarly to Faust. In later games, Arc would take his quirky move set further still.



■ Potemkin has always been the series' powerhouse fighter but his damage output in the original game is insane. He makes Zangief's Spinning Piledriver look positively tame...



FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

SNAGGLETOOTH

▲ I never really got into the original *Guilty Gear*; it was solid enough but just felt unremarkable to me. Really, the game it wanted to be was waiting for the sequel and PS2 release. Though it did add a competent, fresh game to a stagnating 2D fighter market, it didn't start to feel complete till *X2* and its following sequels. It still remains my favourite 2D fighter – bizarre that in a reignited 2D fighting market they haven't been able to turn out a fresh title for modern consoles. It has one of the best casts of fighting games – add together the references to rock and metal in the soundtrack and it's a winner in my book.

Posted by:

BOB SYKO

▲ I have never been very good at fighting games but with games like *Guilty Gear* I never really felt it mattered. Even though my fighting experience normally consists of wildly hammering the face buttons and sticking my tongue out, *Guilty Gear* feels like a rewarding experience; some sort of loud noise or colourful animation seems to happen regardless of skill.

Posted by:

SHADOWMAN

▲ Ah yes, the series that gifted us with characters like Faust – a crazy doctor who wears a bag over his head wielding a massive scalpel! How could you hate a series with a character like that? *Guilty Gear X* kept me glued to my Dreamcast for hours. At the time the one thing that stood out to me was the game's beautiful hi-res graphics.

■ Ishiwatari's influence permeates the entire *Guilty Gear* franchise, the rock and metal vibe still helping the series stand out from its peers.



easier has any value. When creating a fighting tool, we should be making something that will satisfy users and expand the possibilities of the game itself."

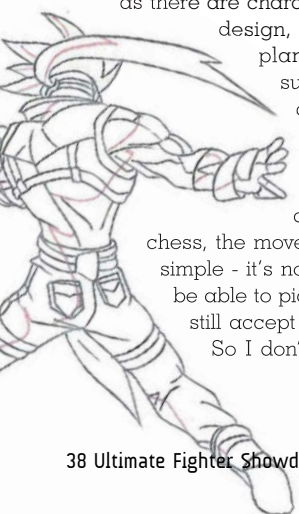
Having intentionally alienated a good number of prospective players by compiling the single most confusing fighter of the time, Arc's insistence on all things being as complex as possible at

least won it the favour of both the hardcore and those that thought they were. An elitist streak has always run through gaming culture, and to be able to say you played something so seemingly obtuse as *Guilty Gear* was a badge of hardcore pride. In fact, it's pride – and, to a lesser degree, naivety – that we have to thank for the game even coming into existence in the first place. "Back then I was only 21, young and quite fearless. So I thought, looking at *Street Fighter II*, that I could create something better," Ishiwatari chuckles. "That was the starting point for *Guilty Gear*. Obviously looking back, it's nowhere near *Street Fighter II*. However, the spirit of trying to make something better than that actually characterised *Guilty Gear*." A candid admission for a developer to make perhaps, though as the years have rolled by Arc's very own rock star has clearly worked on an ever-improving portfolio, so it's only natural he should be critical of the humble beginnings of his art. But for all the great fighters that there have been, it all keeps coming back to just one brand for Ishiwatari. "Of course, there are a lot of fighting games out there, and we like to try and play all of them to learn their strong points and features. So in a loose sense, we've been inspired by all other fighters, but directly it's only really *Street Fighter*."

Ishiwatari, it must be said, would struggle to be any more metal. One need only throw his name into Google image search to find plenty of shots of a man who would look more at home on stage melting fretboards and faces with Dragonforce than behind a monitor working on a videogame. Today he's flying the Queen flag, a particularly nice *Night At*

■ the early *Versus* games respectively, double jumps, charged special moves, off-the-ground attacks, air dashes, instant kills... it's little wonder that many were so quick to dismiss *Guilty Gear*'s brave take on a flagging genre, especially seeing as how the game did a pretty terrible job of explaining itself and why all these features were so important to the experience. On top of that, the familiarity of Ryu and Ken's moveset was nowhere to be found, Sol and Ky as close as Arc came to offering newcomers any kind of comfort blanket, while the likes of skittish Dr Baldhead and frail old-timer Kliff would almost be enough to put a casual player off the genre for life.

■ ■ ■ "BACK THEN, THE majority of fighting games were trying to appeal more to casual players, and often failing. So we came to the conclusion that the fighting game *should* be something difficult," explains Daisuke Ishiwatari, a man who played almost as many roles in *Guilty Gear*'s development as there are characters in the game. Character design, production, voice acting, planning, soundtrack and supporting art all sit among his credits on the original fighter, his name appearing with incredible frequency across a host of different creative disciplines. "If you look at chess, the movement of each piece is not so simple - it's not something most people will be able to pick up immediately. Yet people still accept that this is how chess works. So I don't believe that making games



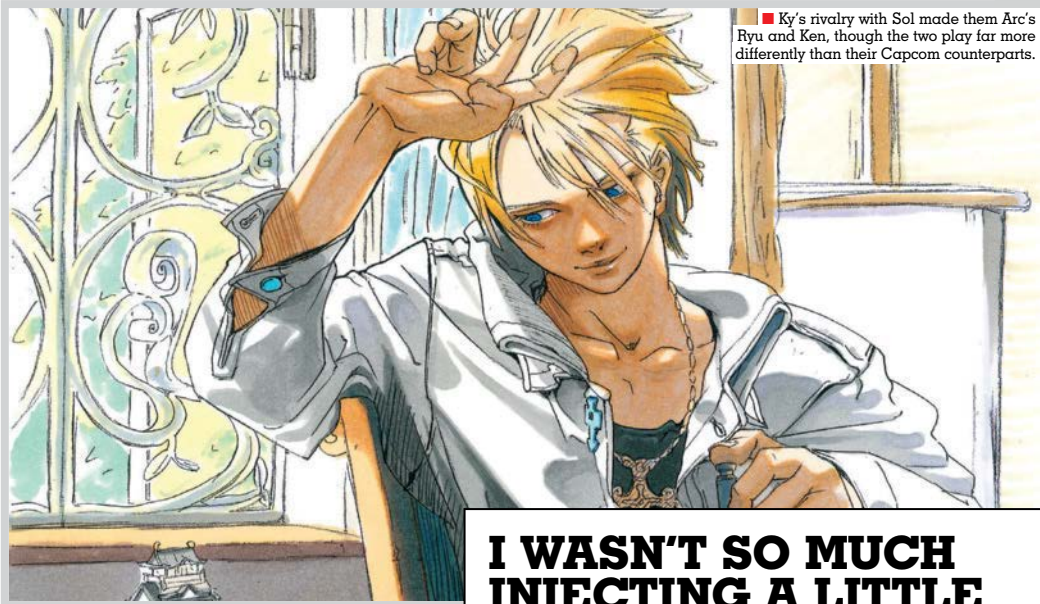
WHAT THEY SAID...



The matches pass at a terrific rate because of the tearing speed the whole game moves at – normally a good feature of a beat-'em-up, but *Guilty Gear* takes it way too far

Play,
Issue 38





■ Ky's rivalry with Sol made them Arc's Ryu and Ken, though the two play far more differently than their Capcom counterparts.

I WASN'T SO MUCH INJECTING A LITTLE OF MYSELF... THAT GAME WAS MYSELF

The Opera tee celebrating his favourite band in style. Given the *Guilty Gear* franchise's plentiful references to rock music, we start to see where it all comes from. But was this vibe a concerted effort to differentiate the game from its peers or simply a result of Ishiwatari working through hands clenched in permanent devil horns?

"When you say differentiate, it makes it sound as if we were making the game to sell more. That's not how we were thinking back then," he recalls. "I have always loved rock and metal, and always used to think while listening to it that it just worked much better as a fighting game soundtrack than the usual style of music. There were a few games that were using guitar-based soundtracks but none of them had the spirit of rock and metal. There was just nobody doing it, so I stepped up." Presumably *Crüe Ball* wasn't so big in Japan, then. Still, if it sounds like Ishiwatari was pouring a little of himself into the game, "It wasn't so much injecting a little of myself," he laughs. "That game was myself."

■■■ AS EACH of Arc's more recent brawlers has done, *Guilty Gear*



impressed with its cast of insanely diverse fighters; between the 13 characters that have been with us since the very beginning, pretty much every style of play was catered for. Potemkin can drink most of your life in just two or three hits and throws, though not being able to dash forces him to be played more defensively. Equally, Millia's speedy hair strikes and the confusing Voldo-esque scuttling of Dr Baldhead (who would go on to become Faust in *Guilty Gear X*) are better suited to quick-thinking players that know their way around combos, with damage sacrificed in the name of high-octane barrages and unpredictability. Meanwhile, poster boys Sol and Ky sat in the middle of the two extremes, a decent blend of speed and power making them the perfect starting points for anyone just setting out on their *Guilty Gear* adventure. The rock/metal influence runs far deeper than just the guitars that wail as you do battle, too – Sol **CONTINUED >**



Party Hard

■ WITH *GUILTY GEAR* and indeed pretty much all of Arc's fighters sat staunchly at the hardcore end of the table, it's hardly surprising that the team should see some of the less technical beat-'em-ups to have been released over the years as an entirely separate genre. In conversation about more recent

fighters, Ishiwatari describes Capcom's latest brawler *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3* as a 'party game' more than it is a fighter, lumping it in with the likes of the *Smash Bros.* series. It's not a derogatory statement, however, as he reminds us of some of Arc's own work that he'd put in the same category.

"*Guilty Gear Isuka* was meant to be a party game," he laughs, suggesting that the four-player fighter might not have turned out quite as the team planned – the PS2 fighter certainly clung rather tenaciously to the usual *Guilty Gear* tenets for something that was apparently meant to be more accessible.

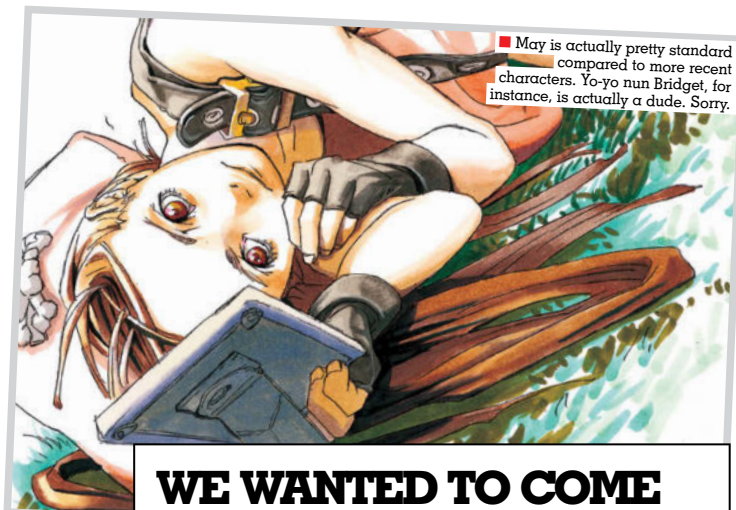




is drenched in Queen references, Ky's Chaos Move is called Ride The Lightning after the Metallica album of the same name, Axl is clearly modeled on his Guns 'N' Roses-fronting namesake, and Testament takes his name from the metal band of the same name. "The *Street Fighter* characters were so established and had already built their know-how and skills, so there's no way we could compete on the same level," Ishiwatari states. "Instead, we wanted to make sure that each character had a whole different identity."

Crafting fighters so unique and varied rather than simply basing the cast on a variety of martial arts as so many other beat-'em-ups had done was a brave move but one which Arc managed to pull off. Kliff's comically oversized blade made Siegfried's giant sword look like a toothpick; May's huge anchor and pendant for tossing dolphins around made a nice change from the usual uppercuts and fireballs; Zato's unique phase-shifting attacks and body extensions proved a headache initially but improbably useful after a little practice. That none of this was explained properly (well, at all, really) was unsurprising at the time, and made the game seem even more hardcore as a result. Even today, only a select few fighters really make a point of selling the benefits of their deeper mechanics, so mastering the unknown felt even more rewarding than it probably should have done. Even the controls were no small hurdle for those accustomed to the usual assortment of button-based punches and kicks. "The button layout is one of the things that defined the original *Guilty Gear*," comments Ishiwatari. "We wanted to come up with something different to other games – it needed to be different to other games."

ARC'S QUEST to do something different culminated in one of its most controversial and initially confusing decisions: the ability to win a match instantly with a single one-hit-kill attack. Ishiwatari is



May is actually pretty standard compared to more recent characters. Yo-yo nun Bridget, for instance, is actually a dude. Sorry.

WE WANTED TO COME UP WITH SOMETHING DIFFERENT... IT NEEDED TO BE DIFFERENT

happy to explain the reasoning behind these divisive moves. "Instant kill attacks were initially implemented to build tension during the game – although you may be winning, you could still be killed at any moment. That tension was something we really wanted to be a strong theme for the game," he tells us.

The aforementioned lack of explanation as to how these really worked led many to despise them. The CPU likes to pull them out pretty regularly and, while countering them isn't all that tough, you need to know what you're doing and be ready for the strike – something that those unaccustomed to the game may not know to do, of course, as Ishiwatari explains. "When we ported it for the arcade versions, it had to change. You don't want to put a coin in and get killed in two seconds. That wouldn't go down well," he laughs.

While these 'win moves' still exist in Arc's games even today, their implementation has changed considerably. *Guilty Gear's* is actually among the fairer systems, with either a button press or perfect parry triggering a pre-kill state, from which each player can enter a command to attack, defend or even steal the other fighter's setup for a cheeky win. "That mechanic has

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION



Capcom's classic fathered the one-on-one fighter as we know it today, inspiring countless developers to follow in its footsteps.



Guilty Gear's hires visuals may have impressed, but in glorious 1080p few titles can hold a candle to the slick beauty of *BlazBlue*.



THE RIGHTS TO REMAIN SILENT

■ EVER WONDER WHY there hasn't been a proper new *Guilty Gear* game in years? The answer, unfortunately, seems to lie outside of Arc's control. With Sega Sammy publishing most of the later *Guilty Gear* titles, it appears that the publisher picked up the rights to the *Guilty Gear* characters somewhere along the way. While Arc is reluctant to say as much, *BlazBlue* seems to be the replacement series until such a time as these issues can be resolved. While we can't imagine Sega would brave a *Guilty Gear* game without calling upon the services of the Arc guys, there doesn't appear to have been much progress. We'd love to see it, and even Arc has stated its desire to return to the series that brought it into the limelight. Fingers crossed, eh?

■ Having one person so creatively dominant on a project was common in the 8-bit and even 16-bit eras, but far less so in the days of the PlayStation.



constantly changed," Ishiwatari muses. "As things progressed, I actually considered removing instant kill attacks but we kept it in almost as an insurance policy to keep fans happy." Especially in more recent games like *BlazBlue* (where instant kills are merely a showboating way to round off a comfortable win), and the most recent versions of *Guilty Gear* where such attacks were telegraphed to the point of being useless, it has become less about using them and more about just having them on hand for a rare and flashy show of strength. "We asked a bunch of players whether they wanted or needed it to stay and the resounding answer was yes, not because they needed it as part of the game's system but because those moves characterised and identified each fighter. It's something we can use to define the characters and the world, and we're constantly searching for the best way to implement it. It also ties into Japanese culture. If you look at most samurai stories, there's always tale of a secret attack, so this secret, difficult move for each character is just something that gets people excited."



DAISUKE ISHIWATARI
Guilty Gear Polymath

With most of the excitement within the genre at the time coming from the spectacle of fighting in three dimensions, it's hardly surprising that *Guilty Gear* had to do something out of the ordinary to draw attention from its contemporaries. But rather than see the rise of the polygon as a threat, Ishiwatari sees the two sub-genres as separate entities, and ones that can happily coexist. "3D fighting games are just branching off from what 2D fighters did back in the day," he tells us. "At its most basic, a fighting game is still a fighting game. I believe that 2D games can learn from 3D games, and vice versa."

So while many were panicking and producing knee-jerk titles that went 3D for no reason and suffered for it, Arc cleverly played to the strengths of having one fewer dimension to worry about.

■ ■ ■ AND TODAY, ARC'S knowledge of its preferred genre is almost second to none, years of experience in creating hardcore beat-'em-ups leading to the studio becoming a household name. But there's still no complacency within the team, and Ishiwatari knows that there's some serious competition in the fighting field, if perhaps not in the same weight class. "Of course, it's not easy to compete with the big guys, but the reason we fight and the targets are different," he says. He seems confident that, while the original *Guilty Gear* hinted at greatness on the hardcore scene, the firm is now sitting pretty as reigning champ. "If you look at the hardcore audience only, Arc is actually much stronger than the big companies. If they want to come into our field, they will struggle – we are much stronger."







Ultimate Fighter Showdown Turbo Edition 43

For a time, it seemed like fighting games were destined to remain a curio of the past, first having succumbed to the tragic demise of Western arcades and then, with the rising popularity of first-person antics and burly space marines, being overshadowed by genres with more mass market appeal. But similarly to how a world economy can go from boom to bust in the space of a few years, fighting games have broken out of their own recession and kick-started a second golden era that holds a promising future.

"I think all genres have their cycles," muses Daisuke Ishiwatari, Arc System Works' resident metal-head and the man responsible for the spectacular *Guilty Gear* series. "There was a time when fighting games were huge and then their popularity waned. But now we're seeing people return to this style of game and rediscovering the fun of competitive play. I hope this enjoyment will continue and that more players will step out of their homes and enjoy the social side that fighting game communities can offer." And if the record-breaking attendance at this year's Evolution Championship Series is anything to go by, the future is looking more than bright. And it's partly thanks to a certain retro revival.

Little over three years ago, the world warriors emerged from their crypt with sun-starved eyes, wiped the sleep from their faded faces and then proceeded to beat seven bells out of each other in a chorus of dragon punches and tiger knees that put *Street Fighter* back on the front cover – 16 times over. And yet despite *Street Fighter IV*'s meteoric



Ryoto Niitsuma Producer, *Ultimate Marvel Vs. Capcom 3*

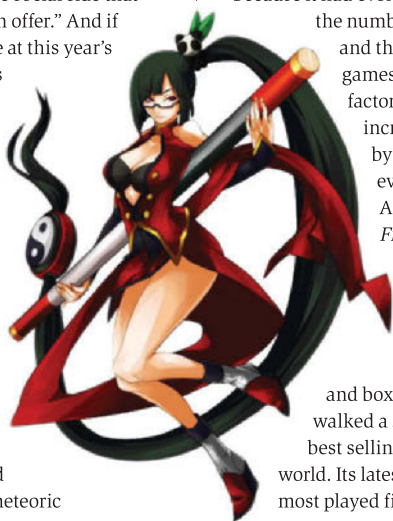
success, Yoshinori Ono remains modest about his team's accomplishments. "All we did was rekindle the passion that had been started by our fans over 20 years ago," Ono says with a nonchalant smile. "After the release of *Street Fighter IV*, there's been a phenomenal number of tournaments held all over the world by fans, and this clearly shows who's keeping it going. My role is basically dwindling!"

The hardcore community welcomed *Street Fighter* back with open arms, but its crowning achievement was how it brought new and old players together. "It was back to the source," suggests Daishi Odashima, director of the up-and-coming *Soul Calibur V*. "*Street Fighter III* laid out a situation where beginners couldn't start playing because it had evolved too much. As a result, the number of players didn't increase and the popularity of fighting games declined. Considering these factors, I think [Ono] decided to increase the number of players by creating a fighting game that even beginners could enjoy." And yet, to speak solely of *Street Fighter* would be a disservice to a more diligent series, one that doesn't even know what sabbatical means. Known for its dysfunctional families and boxing kangaroos, *Tekken* has walked a steadfast path and is the best selling fighting game series in the world. Its latest iteration also ranks as the most played fighting game in Japanese

"PERSONALLY, I LIKE SOUL CALIBUR... I'VE LEARNED A LOT FROM THE SERIES"

arcades – a title that it has defended for nearly four years. "Mister Ono from Capcom said that while all other fighting games were disappearing, *Tekken* stayed popular and continued to expand its popularity in a lot of countries," describes *Tekken 6* producer, Katsuhiro Harada, when talking about his fiercest rival and friend. "He then researched it and used the results of his studies to inspire the development of *Street Fighter IV*. During the ten-year period when *Street Fighter* was absent, both on arcade and consoles, *Tekken* didn't cower and it hasn't been losing popularity – rather, it's gaining popularity."

The genre's resurgence has also given rise to a handful of new challengers, which have given the grizzled veterans a serious run for their fight money – and none more so than the stellar *BlazBlue*. "When we started to develop *BlazBlue*, there were a number of key factors we wanted to focus on that many fighting games do not," enthuses



FUTURE ATTRACTIONS

With the resurgence of fighting games looking to peak with the close of the current console generation, we look to a few of the contenders getting ready to enter the ring

THE KING OF FIGHTERS XIII

It's far to say that *The King Of Fighters XII* was a disappointment – not because it was a particularly bad game, but because the roster felt half-finished and the game lacked anything but the most basic single-player content. *The King of Fighters XIII*, however, has been tearing it up in Japanese arcades for just over a year with a console port finally being made available next month. Hopefully the return of Mai, King and Vice – as well as a dramatically overhauled combo system that makes use of *Street Fighter*-style EX specials – will put the king back on its rightful throne.



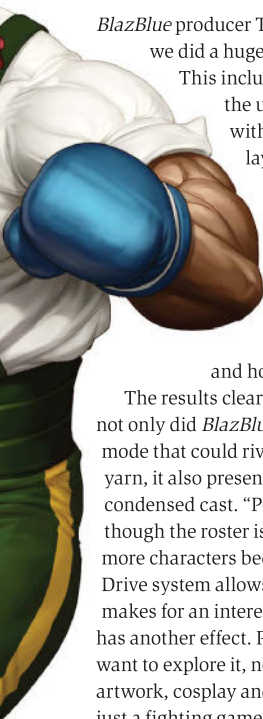
SOUL CALIBUR V

Although the previous *Soul Calibur* was beautifully designed and enjoyable to play, it didn't feel like a whole lot had changed since *Soul Calibur III*. And the less said about the shoe-horning in of *Star Wars* characters the better. But for the next chapter on the stage of history, Daishi Odashima and his team are moving the series further into the future with the children of the saintly Sophitia facing off against the few returning oldies like Siegfried, Mitsurugi and Voldo. The combat system is also set to be swifter, with a stronger emphasis on close quarters combat and less of pole-prancing cheapness.



SKULLGIRLS

When a Western development team led by a well-known fighting game enthusiast announces a new fighting game, that features girls who fight with demonic hair and muscular hats, you know you're in for something slightly off-centre that has all the potential to be really quite special. The style of *Skullgirls* is best described as 'cartoony' with a dark sense of humour, while the gameplay mechanics will tackle the balancing issues prevalent in other fighting games. The ability to customise your own tag team assists is also an interesting idea that should add combo flexibility.



BlazBlue producer Toshimichi Mori. "For instance, we did a huge amount of work on the story. This includes the characters, their place in the universe and the organisations within it – we wanted to create layers of detail and stories within stories. We even discussed things like character motivation, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and then worked this detail into not just how they looked, but also their personalities, fighting style and how they played."

The results clearly speak for themselves, as not only did *BlazBlue* offer an expansive story mode that could rival the word count of a JRPG yarn, it also presented players with a deceptively condensed cast. "People often say that even though the roster is small, it feels like there are more characters because of the diversity that the Drive system allows for," Mori proudly states. "This makes for an interesting fighting system, but it also has another effect. People love the mythology. They want to explore it, not just in-game but through artwork, cosplay and video. It's become more than just a fighting game, rather a piece of entertainment that people outside the competitive sphere can enjoy. We've found girls and anime fans – people who have previously been alienated from fighting games – enjoying it." And this forward-thinking approach, of looking beyond the combative mechanics, has secured *BlazBlue* a place among the modern-day fighting game elite.

Which begs the question: what exactly is a modern fighting game? Ono likens it to a state of Zanshin – a Japanese term that means total awareness. "Fighting games are about



deeply reading into your opponent's mind and executing feint manoeuvres with all the physical accuracy and vigilance of a professional audio typist," Ono poetically puts it. "It's not fought entirely in the digital arena, but a few seconds after the famous call of 'Round 1 – Fight!' you can almost measure the skill of your opponent. It's similar to the atmosphere of martial arts like judo, karate and kendo, with small steps back and forth while reading the distance."

But where does this mentality leave the likes of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros.*, an instantly accessible series that far outsells Capcom and

Namco Bandai's finest combatants on a game-for-game basis, but is often shunned by those hardened arcade stick owners who prefer one-frame links and epically timed super cancels?

"*Super Smash Bros.* is more for beginners or the general public," Harada suggests, "and everybody can play this fantastic game. But I think *Super Smash Bros.* is completely different from fighting games like *Tekken*, *Street Fighter* and *Virtua Fighter*. I don't put the game in the same category. I think it's in a different genre."



"SUPER SMASH BROS. IS MORE FOR BEGINNERS OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC"

Katsuhiro Harada Producer, *Tekken 6*

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

After years of dominating the opposing 2D and 3D fighter scenes, Capcom and Namco Bandai have finally decided to see who the undisputed champion is by each developing a fighting game with both *Street Fighter* and *Tekken* characters. The Namco-developed venture is still far off in the distance, but after playing *Street Fighter X Tekken* at Gamescom it's clear that Capcom is aiming for something between *Street Fighter IV* and *Marvel*, and yet entirely its own kind of game. The new Cross Assault mechanic, where both characters can be used simultaneously, should make combo experimentation all the sweeter.



TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2

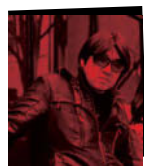
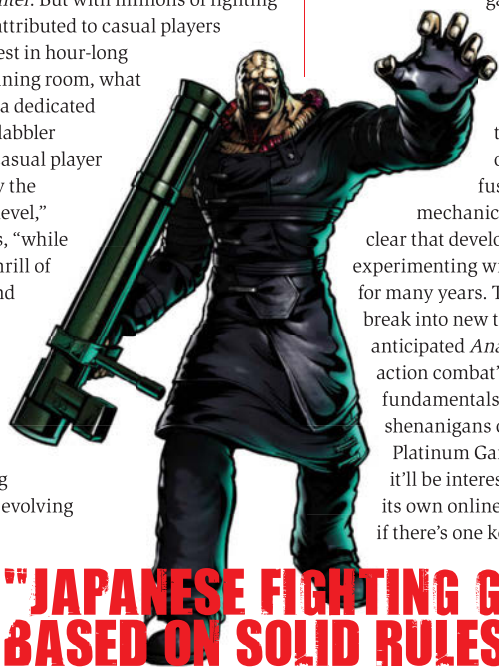
Considering just how successful *Tekken Tag Tournament* was when it was ported to the PlayStation 2 all those years ago, we're surprised it's taken Namco Bandai so long to unveil a true sequel. But now that it has finally been confirmed, we can't stop thinking about optimum team combinations. Maybe a cyborg duo of Yoshimitsu and Bryan Fury, or perhaps a more menacing partnership of Devil Jin and True Ogre? Whatever the case may be, it'll be interesting to see how the combo opportunities open up when King and his breastplate-loving mentor are grappling in unison.

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

There's no escaping the fact this boxed update is coming less than a year after *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3* launched. But while that may seem a tad cavalier by some players' standards, as long as *Ultimate* adds a wealth of new content and addresses some balancing issues – Phoenix and the X-Factor system, for instance – we'll welcome it with open arms. We're also looking forward to hunting former STARS with Nemesis, building chain combos with Ghost Rider and objecting profusely at the old Phoenix with the new one. And if you squint really, really hard, Rocket Raccoon almost looks like a furry Mega Man.



When you break it down, it's clear that *Super Smash Bros.* is more accessible than the games Harada mentions – you don't see proximity mines and Pokéballs bouncing off Akira's head in *Virtua Fighter*. But with millions of fighting game sales being attributed to casual players who have no interest in hour-long sessions in the training room, what is it that separates a dedicated diehard from the dabbler demographic? "A casual player will play and enjoy the game on a simple level," Ishiwatari ponders, "while appreciating the thrill of simply winning and losing. A hardcore player will enjoy understanding why they are winning and losing, and take pleasure in sharing those reasons and evolving their tactics."



"JAPANESE FIGHTING GAMES ARE BASED ON SOLID RULES, NOT THE CHAOS OF POSSIBILITIES"

Toshimichi Mori Producer, BlazBlue: Continuum Shift 2

As a comparison between core and casual, it's a well-reasoned argument that rings true from our own personal experience. But for Ono, this simplistic disparity is far too clean cut. "If you know who Yoshinori Ono is, you're a hardcore fighting game fan. Otherwise, you're a casual [laughs]. But on a serious note, it's becoming increasingly difficult to define since there are many ways to be interested in the vast universe of games – be it smartphones or browser games. Are people who spend hours on smartphone games hardcore gamers? I think in this day and age, where many levels of interaction with games exist, we need to change the way we approach gamers other than just hardcore and casual."

And with the likes of *Street Fighter IV* *Volt* and *The King of Fighters - i* already doing good business on iOS-compatible systems like the iPhone, it's clear that fighting game developers are already looking beyond the established console, handheld, arcade and PC markets. They're also making steps to move beyond the boundaries of the genre itself. "The fighting game genre is established so firmly that it's difficult to change," Odashima implies with a knowing look. "For example, the rules

of football don't suddenly change even though a great player appears – such as Lionel Andrés Messi. But as long as it's interesting as a game, I don't stick to the rigid framework of a fighting game. Fighting games can evolve into other genres."

This progressive approach isn't anything new, as looking back to the open 3D arenas of *Power Stone*, and the fusion of shooter and fighter mechanics in *Virtual-On*, it's clear that development teams have been experimenting with the fighter template for many years. The genre-bending will break into new territory with the eagerly anticipated *Anarchy Reigns* – an 'online action combat' game that will fuse fighter fundamentals with the hack-and-slash shenanigans of *Bayonetta*. And as Platinum Games' first online venture, it'll be interesting to see how it crafts its own online versus system, because if there's one key element which has

strengthened fighting games over the last few years, it's online services like Xbox Live and PlayStation Network.

"It's good to see people actively talking about fighting games," Mori confesses. "Online play has helped to make experiencing one-on-one combat with a human opponent easier, and I think this is very important in the US and Europe as the arcade scene is not as strong as it is in Japan." His comments, somewhat ironically, coincide with the recent closure of Funland in London's busy Piccadilly Circus – formerly the biggest arcade in the UK. "I recently came to Paris for the World Game Cup and for the Arc System Clash tournament in London," Mori continues, "and was very pleased to see so many people enjoying our fighting games. Not just the competitive side, but also the social side."

When looking towards the future of fighting games, there's one undeniable fact that often gets overlooked, and that's Japan's borderline monopoly of the genre itself. "The West has a habit of over-complicating things," Mori puts forward with brutal honesty. "Physics, realism, calculating what happens if X hits Y, or what happens if X hits Y when Z is happening. Adding in all these variables in pursuit of realism doesn't help. They're not important. Japanese fighting games are based on solid rules, not the chaos

GOLDEN OLDIES

We asked each of our interviewees to describe the fighting game they most admire. And just to be on the safe said, they had to pick from outside the company they work for

FATAL FURY

TOSHIMICHI MORI

"When I was younger, I liked the characters and the universe it was set in. As the series went on, this side of the game stopped being explored and it saddened me. This is why *BlazBlue* has such a strong story mode."



SOUL CALIBUR

RYOTO NIITSUMA

"Personally, I like the *Soul Calibur* series. The way the characters are shown, the atmosphere and the solid content even in non-fighting scenes. It's so good and I've learned a lot from the series."



SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

KATSUHIRO HARADA AND JOHN EDWARDS

Harada – "It had a big influence on my life. I hold my arcade pad like I hold a wine glass. It's a strange way to hold a pad, but I played *Super Turbo* so much that I bruised my left hand and it got covered in blisters. I still have the scar even today."

Edwards – "It's still played competitively today because of how incredibly tight it is. It doesn't rely on gimmicks. It is a perfect example of giving the player a toolbox and allowing them to find creative ways to utilise it."



GUILTY GEAR XX RELOAD

DAISHI ODASHIMA

"It's interesting that every character has his or her specific system in *Guilty Gear XX*. It's fun that the game's system is basically unbalanced, which allows for traps and Burst can eventually resolve everything. I especially love the system in *Guilty Gear XX #Reload*."



STREET FIGHTER III 3RD STRIKE

DAISUKE ISHIWATARI

"I think for me, it must be *3rd Strike*. In that game you can really feel the tension between the two players, particularly when they're trying to compete for dominance in space and anticipate and counter each other."



TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT

YOSHINORI ONO

"I've been talking to the *Tekken* team a lot and come to respect how they pulled it off with such time and hardware restrictions. The tag idea was innovative and I really respect that. *Street Fighter X Tekken* will take full advantage of this idea."





Daisha Odashima Director, Soul Calibur V

"THE FIGHTING GAME GENRE IS ESTABLISHED SO FIRMLY THAT IT'S DIFFICULT TO CHANGE"

games is partially because of player anxiety," Odashima states while giving us a slightly accusing stare. "Most players, especially those who are series fans, tend not to want big changes which nullify their efforts. The flow of *Street Fighter II*, *Street Fighter III* and *Street Fighter IV* is a good example. If developers want to change games dramatically, they can set up a new franchise." Which is more or less what SNK did consistently throughout the Nineties and, more recently, what Arc System Works achieved with both *Fist Of The North Star* and *Battle Fantasia*.

Despite all this talk of how fighting games will evolve in the future, however, there's still *Street Fighter X Tekken*, *The King Of Fighters XIII* and the fan-developed *Skullgirls* to consider – soon to be released games that will take the genre another step forward, but underneath it all, will resemble the classics in more ways than one. "There are natural limitations to the genre," Mori concludes. "It's like asking, 'How can we make a tennis experience that's completely different?' You can bend the rules only so far before it stops being tennis. Will we see a game that revolutionises the genre? I hope so! We must never stop looking for new ways to be creative and new ways to entertain. And that

could come from many sources, including how we approach character design and the kinds of control devices we use."

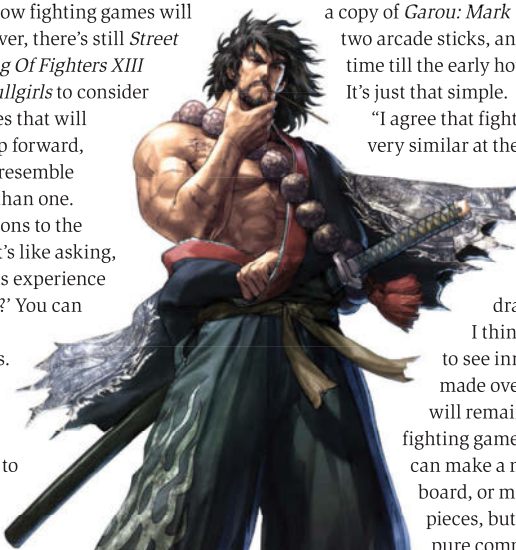
But no matter where the genre ends up in the future, whether it diversifies into other genres, expands into other mediums, sees a radical new input device or sees more widespread development across the globe – or even remains largely the same – there's one thing that will never change, and that's how the best examples of the genre will continue to stand the test of time. Give us a comfy sofa, an assortment of snacks, a working Neo Geo AES and

a copy of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* with two arcade sticks, and we'll lose track of time till the early hours of the morning. It's just that simple.

"I agree that fighting games are very similar at the absolute basest of levels," Edwards concedes, "but there is still plenty of variety to make them feel dramatically different.

I think we will continue to see innovations being made over time, but the core will remain the same. To me, fighting games are like chess. You can make a more elaborate chess board, or make prettier, flashier pieces, but at its heart it's the pure competitiveness that is what really drives it; I don't see that changing any time in the near future."

Amen to that.



of possibilities. When you control these rules you have more control over the kind of experience you're trying to offer. You have more control over your craft, more control over balance and more control over how you create the fun."

It's a view that's shared by Harada, who praises North American developers for their visual trickery, but believes Japanese developers have a better understanding of technical gameplay. "In order to structure a core system of detailed strategy," Harada theorises, "you need to have a complete strategy of time and distance. With that in mind, you also need human animation in the frame. Everybody can do calculation, but you need to have the sense of combined mathematics, entertainment and exhilarating animation. Of course, this is just general theory but, in reality, I think the reason *Mortal Kombat* exists is because it has core creative staff that have this knowhow." And one of these core



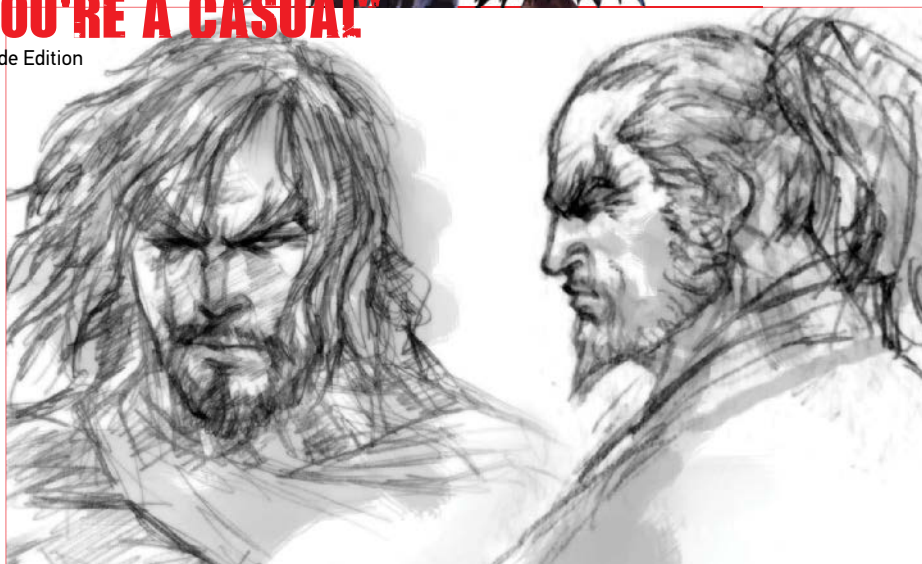
"IF YOU KNOW WHO YOSHINORI ONO IS, YOU'RE A Hardcore FIGHTING GAME FAN. OTHERWISE, YOU'RE A CASUAL!"

Yoshinori Ono Producer, Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition

creative staff is none other than John Edwards, lead designer at NetherRealm Studios.

"I think the genre is relatively niche and isn't as safe to jump into as say the FPS market," Edwards states, while offering insight as to why Western developers usually shy away from fighting games." Because there are a handful of successful franchises, and because fans are usually incredibly loyal to their favourite, it can scare off new interest due to the perceived risk. It's also a very different type of game to make from what currently dominates the Western market, design-wise. It takes a very specific subset of design knowledge to be able to create a fighting game, and because of this, it can be hard to find the talent required."

This fan favouritism has also had a profound effect on the progression of many established fighting game series. "The slow progress of fighting



Street Fighter Man

LAST YEAR, FIGHTING GAMES WENT FROM BEING A HARDCORE, UNDERGROUND CORNER OF GAMING TO ENJOYING THE KIND OF POPULARITY THE GENRE HASN'T SEEN SINCE STREET FIGHTER II DRAGON-PUNCHED ITS WAY ONTO THE SCENE BACK IN 1991. THE CATALYST? IN TRUE HISTORY REPEATING FORM, IT HAD TO BE ANOTHER STREET FIGHTER GAME. **GAMES™** SITS DOWN WITH STREET FIGHTER IV PRODUCER YOSHINORI ONO TO DISCUSS THE REBIRTH OF A GENRE, CAPCOM'S NEW-FOUND COMMUNITY FOCUS AND HIS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



Yoshinori Ono rolls back in his chair and falls sideways, knocked off balance by what appears to be a combination of amusement, anguish and respect, howling all the while. For the last hour, we've been chatting to the Capcom producer through a translator, but now we're given a chance to converse with him in his own tongue, a language he created – the language of *Street Fighter IV*.

In this exchange, both parties understand each other perfectly, and the countless hours of training pay off. Buzzing from a confident performance, our Ibuki lands a solid Focus Attack to crumple Ono's Juri, and we launch immediately into a quick Target Combo before Super Jump cancelling the last hit into her Hashinsho Ultra. This is the feat that sends the Capcom man reeling, the flurry of kunai on the screen accompanied just this once by the tortured wails of an industry legend. If we lost you to the lingo back there, we apologise. *Street Fighter* jargon might not be the easiest for many to understand, after all. And when he's not literally getting beaten at his own game, that's just one of many wrongs that Ono is looking to set right.

While his portfolio might not display the focus on or dedication to the beat-'em-up genre of so many of his peers, Ono has nonetheless walked a path paved with great titles to become the mouthpiece of the illustrious *Street Fighter* franchise. His production duties started shakily with 2003's divisive PlayStation 2 hack-and-slash title *Chaos Legion*, later leading to underrated gems like *Shadow Of Rome* and the excellent *Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams*. However, Ono's previous contributions and credits span far more critically acclaimed releases like *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and *Devil May Cry*. His earlier roles tended to involve

overseeing audio departments, and working alongside the likes of Hideki Kamiya, Shinji Mikami and Yoshiki Okamoto has been integral to Ono's rise to power. Today, the *Super Street Fighter IV* producer must now rate as one of the most animated, passionate and community-focused figures in the Japanese development scene.

Ono's latest project is *Street Fighter X Tekken*, an announcement so unlikely that we refused to believe it to be anything more than the world's least timely April Fool's prank – until the gameplay footage rolled out of Comic-Con. Looking back, the hints were there in the preceding weeks: Ono appeared at world fighting game tournament Evo alongside long-time friend and *Tekken* producer Katsuhiro Harada to first set tongues wagging, then his Twitter feed grew dense with unintentionally cryptic clues as fans pushed Ono for an early reveal.

"I really like working with other people, especially within the fighting game industry," Ono says. "Looking back to the late Eighties and early Nineties, there were so many fighting games going on. And so to coincide with the current revival of the fighting genre, I think it'd be really good to start involving those people that used to make fighting games once again, and to collaborate in order to increase the presence of fighters in the industry."

The phenomenon is huge in Japan, where cross-promotion of unrelated brands is a common tactic for raising interest by combining multiple fan-bases. But

with around two years before *Street Fighter X Tekken* and its Namco-developed counterpart *Tekken X Street Fighter* are due to ship, neither side is ready to discuss the projects beyond the fact that there will be little or no communication between studios regarding what each intends to do with each other's characters. The early footage served to dispel preconceptions and whet our appetites, though it'll be a gruelling wait between appetiser and main course.

With one crossover fighter already in development at Capcom, it's little wonder that there was so much doubt

"Capcom was actually against the idea, but because everyone kept on asking for it and mentioning it we were able to get them to move on it"

surrounding the rumours of Ono working on another. All the same, this hasn't stopped the world from tracking him down and demanding sequels.

"I was involved in *Capcom Vs. SNK 2*, and lots of interviewers ask me when *Capcom Vs. SNK 3* will be out," he says, with no small amount of passion. "It's obviously up to SNK, but it's an interesting thought and I'd like to do it if I had the chance." We crumble under the pressure, and enquire about when *Capcom Vs. SNK 3* will be released. Ono laughs. "Since we made *Capcom Vs. SNK 2*, SNK as a company has changed. Now it's SNK Playmore, and the people at that company are slightly different to the ones we knew back then, so we'd first have to approach and create a relationship with them. You're talking maybe five years at the earliest."

Yoshinori Ono gives the impression of being a man who likes to keep busy, and the wish list of games he'd like to make continues to grow as our conversation draws on. "Personally, I love the *Darkstalkers* series, and the fact that you've been hearing rumours means that my conspiracy is succeeding," he smiles. "That's how it all started for *Street Fighter IV*. Capcom was actually against the idea, but because everyone kept on asking for it and mentioning it we were able to get them to move on it. So now what I'm trying to do is seed the demand for *Darkstalkers*. Once people start making enough noise about it, Capcom will have to get me to make it."

Ono's optimism is certainly infectious, but we can't help but think that Capcom, which recently announced significantly poorer year-on-year figures than it originally forecast, might have a stricter green-lighting process than Ono is letting on. Doom and gloom aside, Ono's vision for what a new *Darkstalkers* could and should be is a far cry from the chunky characters and flashy pseudo-3D stylings of *Street Fighter's* new look.



Fireball Motion

★ IT DOESN'T EXACTLY take a genius to work out that applying motion controls to *Street Fighter* would be asking for trouble. "I'm quite interested in it, sure. People always ask if it's something

that I'd incorporate into a *Street Fighter* game, but if you try to imagine it with motion controls, you'd be absolutely exhausted by the end of round one. If you're talking about the fighting genre,

where it's typically one-on-one or two-on-two, I think it'd be physically too burdening to attempt such a thing. A man of my age wouldn't even be able to play that sort of game!"

Ono laughs, though the giggles don't stop there, as the producer racks his brains as to what his

team could do with Move, Wii or Kinect. "If I was to create a motion-controlled game, we'd have to come up with some brand new idea – *Street Fighter Fit* or *Street Fighter Exercise*? No, *Street Fighter Yoga*! Although that would involve flame-breathing, so I'm not sure we'd get away with that."

"If and when it becomes possible, I'd like to be able to deliver the impact of the original *Darkstalkers* look – Japanese animation-style pixels in smooth motion," he says, and we immediately conjure the image of Sasquatch, all chunky and colourful like Blanka in *Street Fighter IV*. The idea that we might one day see a *BlazBlue*-esque, super high-res *Darkstalkers* cast is enough to set us penning begging letters to Capcom from every nonsensical *Brass Eye* pseudonym we can remember.

If nothing else, it's refreshing to hear that the team doesn't see *Street Fighter*'s polygonal rebirth as a point of no return. "I'm not actually that bothered whether we use 2D sprites or 3D," states Ono. "The art direction for *Street Fighter IV* came simply from the fact that 3D modelling landed us closer to the perceptions people had for *Street Fighter II* characters – we were able to realise what people had in mind better in 3D. If we do a *Darkstalkers* game in the future, and it turns out that 2D is better suited to people's memories of the games, then we'll do that too."

Ono's motto seems to be 'Ask and ye shall receive', with point after point rolling back to the idea that Capcom's community is more important now than it has ever been. Ono himself is extremely active and responsive on Twitter (see 'Tweet Fighter'), but with Capcom Unity and a host of other sites and forums looking out for the end user, there are plenty of other avenues for gamers to have their say. For years, we've seen the internet buckle under the weight of pointless petitions to bring back *Fusion Frenzy*, or put Ryu in *Monster Hunter*, but today we have a far more direct line to the people with the casting vote on what goes into some of the best games on the market.

"For *Street Fighter*, I try my best not to isolate myself from the users. We make sure that everyone at Capcom Europe, Capcom US and even Capcom Japan has a way to contact me, so anyone can say things and I can reply, or at least consider what has been brought up. I think that's very important."

Giving the general public this level of access to key figures is never going to result in the most reasoned requests falling into their inboxes, as Ono is all too ready to admit. "The majority of requests that I receive are based on individual players and the characters that they play – 'make Ryu more powerful' or 'make Zangief invincible', for instance. If I listened to all of these requests, all of the characters would basically be invincible," he laughs. "That shouldn't really be happening. What's important is to filter out the selfish requests and extract the real intentions – it might not be that they think Zangief should *actually* be invincible, rather that a certain element of him isn't up to scratch. They might all be saying 'make my character stronger', but if you filter out all the noise you tend to see patterns in the requests. These things are important, and, if the changes match the style of the game, that's when we'll start to implement changes. It becomes more of a collaboration between the players, the battle director and the team."

Evidently, *Super Street Fighter IV* was something of a compromise in this respect. "I can safely say that I wasn't able to implement everything that was requested. But everything that was done for *Super* was done based on requests from the community." This is indicative of changing times both in terms of the way developers view their user-bases and the way Capcom in particular is making a conscious effort to cater to the lucrative Western market.



Peach Party

★ YOU MAY HAVE noticed Ono's tendency to make reference to pretty girls, even out of context. Any guesses as to who his favourite character in the series might be? No, it's not Zangief. Nice try though, and relatively close in a way. "If you're asking me

about the whole franchise I'd say Rainbow Mika, because she has a nice bottom," he says, a broad smile dancing across his face. "I actually tried to get her in the original *Street Fighter IV*. I'd whisper in the director's ear every day but he just wouldn't take it

on board. For *Super*, I tried again but we found that she didn't fit the roster, didn't fit the style of *Street Fighter IV*. We don't even have a stage with a fence for Vega – if we aren't even going to do that, how can we bother with a wrestling ring for Rainbow Mika?"

"Japanese creators tend to be... well, they *can* be quite narrow-minded," admits Ono. "Game creators tend to want praise from their girlfriends or wives, and they don't consider that there are any other girls outside of Japan. I'd like everyone in the world – all the girls in the world – to give me praise for my amazing games."

Through the laughter, we struggle to weigh up whether his bizarre analogy is a stylised take on the Japanese scene or a glimpse into Ono's true ambitions, but his subsequent comments tilt the scales marginally in the favour of the former. "To explain a little more rationally, rather than being valued only in Japan, it's become far more important to be valued globally, and Japanese creators often forget that there's more to the world than just Japan. I know it's very difficult for those living in Japan because that's all they see, but I think it's important that they see the bigger picture and think globally."

Part of that process has involved changing the way Capcom has operated for many years. The fact that *Super Street Fighter IV* hit consoles before arcades, for example, is evidence of a huge shift in priorities. "In terms of the player expertise hierarchy, obviously people that want to play in arcades are the top tier people. It's true that, up until now, Japanese fighting games have been benchmarked by those top-notch players, going through location tests with them so that the game can be adjusted and then launched globally. However, if we get rid of the arcade scene, we're kind of losing the roots of the fighting scene itself, so I think it's important to keep the arcade scene going, at least in Japan where it's still relatively popular."

Interestingly, for territories with less developed arcade cultures to Japan, Ono and his team see the potential for online interaction within games to become a valid alternative. "The arcade community in Japan usually exists in isolated clusters – they might be unique to particular counties, cities or arcades. You have, say, four machines and a bunch of people that always go there to play or talk about it, or research the game. What we're trying to do with online modes is take that to a global scale, so people around the world can talk about the game over voice chat, share footage or play together online. This way, even those isolated clusters in Japan can start interacting with the global community, who themselves don't have the places or the means to create these clusters."

With the limited replay functionality offered by *Super Street Fighter IV*, it's clear that this way of thinking is still in its infancy, but the potential is clearly there. There's no reason fighters couldn't embrace the same kind of community features being implemented in Bizarre Creations' *Blur* and Criterion's *Need For Speed Hot Pursuit* – the latter shunning social network integration in favour of a bespoke framework that offers the same features and more.

It's not just the fighting genre that is changing, either. As we mentioned, Ono himself has jumped between a number of different projects on his way to becoming Capcom's very own king of fighters, and each new style of game has presented fresh creative challenges. He eagerly runs through what makes the beat-'em-up a unique proposition compared to other genres, though the focus remains close to home with the *Street Fighter* series.

"Game creators tend to want praise from their girlfriends or wives... I'd like all the girls in the world to give me praise for my amazing games"

"I think it's a different sort of entertainment, because when you watch, say, *Avatar*, you think, 'Wow, James Cameron is amazing' – you're watching what he has created in the way he wanted to show it," he says, before gesturing towards the camera resting on the floor by our feet. "With *Street Fighter*, it's more like your camera. Canon made the camera, but what you do with it is entirely up to the photographer. It's the same with our games – we provide *Street Fighter* but the people actually creating the games are the players themselves."

When I was working on the *Onimusha* series, that was a game where we had to spend a lot of time thinking how each part of the game would be received by the player.

We had to direct at each point how the player should feel and how they should react. But for fighting games, we don't know who's going to play or how they're going to play, so what we do is create a broader framework and write the rules, but we leave the player to write the actual gameplay. In a way, we have to concentrate more on the framework rather than on the intricate direction required in other genres."

Suddenly, the conversation swings from reflection to aspiration, as Ono opens his heart about a secret passion we'd never have expected from the guy behind the world's leading fighter. "I'm very interested in educational games. At the moment, small kids are having to either pretend to be grown-ups in order to play adult games, or are playing games that are basically made for kids, which kids won't take because even they have their pride. I'd like to make games for these kids that won't insult them and are made for them, games that they wouldn't feel ashamed to play. And once they



Tweet Fighter

★ ANY CAPCOM FANS on Twitter would do well to follow one Yoshi_OnoChin, Ono's own Twitter account, and one - like the rest of the world - he fills with amusing anecdotes and pictures of his dinner. Perhaps the best thing about keeping an eye on this (besides the fact that

most Tweets directed his way are honoured with a short, if often slightly broken, response) is the fact that Ono has a little Twitter friend that goes everywhere with him. A disproportionate Blanka toy features in every picture the Capcom man uploads to his feed;

having appeared in all kinds of unlikely situations, the green action figure sits in front of everything from sneaky teases and reveals to pictures of airports. Unleash your inner sleuth and get your follow on, if only to see where Blanka ends up next.



be difficult to comprehend. Reading things in a book gives people the chance of not understanding, but if they can interact with something and be shown how and why it works, it'd definitely be helpful. I'd like to see games not just as a type of entertainment but as a part of our culture – integrate the whole concept of gaming into people's everyday lives."

The weight of so much serious contemplation doesn't seem to sit well with Ono, and he can't maintain his straight face for too long. "But obviously, I'm just using all these big concepts to impress you," he smiles. "All I want really is praise from lots of young, pretty models who would be impressed with my work educating their kids on their behalf."

As our time with Ono draws to a close, it's clear that he's warmed to our company and the candid admissions just keep coming. This is a man who manages to turn compliments around with the greatest of ease, humble in spite of being able to take credit for the phoenix-like resurrection of an entire genre. But when we suggest that might be the case, he instead pleads guilty to the crime we're thanking him for solving. "In a way, the decline of the fighting game scene is partially our fault because we didn't release anything for so long," he says. While the over-saturation of *Street Fighter* updates in the series' heyday may have been the beginning of the end, it's hard to blame Capcom for following the rest of the industry in heeding the public's demand for 3D games.

"We're glad that people have woken up and responded to our invitation. It's a very encouraging situation for us, and one that drives us to carry on. You can't use this to play *Modern Warfare*," he laughs, holding his Mad Katz Tournament Stick aloft as though he were Link discovering yet another boomerang. "So obviously it has a lot to do with fighting games becoming more popular! I think it's a simple display of instinctive competition. Kids want to run faster than others, get better results than others, be more popular with girls than others... it's the same kind of thing, showing that you want to display your superiority over others. There's that fundamental rivalry."

"The reason fighting games tend to have a stronger tendency to attract players like this is empathy. Obviously it's just a game but in other genres, you

"For fighting games, what we do is create a broader framework and write the rules, but we leave the player to write the actual gameplay"

reach the age of 12, by playing my educational games they'd hopefully have become competitive enough to start playing *Street Fighter*."

It's an intriguing concept, not least the notion that so-called 'educational' titles could have the potential to breed a competitive instinct in young players – or even whether they should, for that matter. But it's not our place to question the vision of a developer with such a proven track record, and Ono is already racing ahead with characteristic zeal.

"It's definitely a long-term plan, and education usually requires a lot of time. With that in mind, I feel there's a need to nurture gaming culture. At the moment, government officials like to attack games – whenever there's a problem, games get the blame. It's obviously just because they don't understand and they reject things that they're not familiar with. So it's important that we can familiarise everyone with the whole culture of gaming from when they're young. Some things, when taught in school or taught through words, can

might use guns or magic, and it can be hard to relate to that. But when it comes to *Street Fighter*, it's all about flesh and blood – it's easier for people to relate to actual fist-fighting." Well, actual fist-fighting where punches can set people on fire, fighters throw balls of energy at one another and old men can defy gravity, at least. That's our favourite kind of 'actual' fist-fighting.

Meeting your heroes is always a risky business. If they turn out to be obnoxious, self-obsessed freaks then your perception of an entire company, band or franchise can change in a heartbeat. Other times, though, it can be a revelation, and today is one of those days. Ono is a character as entertaining and vivid as any of the fighters that appear on the roster of his latest game, passion and spirit dripping from his every word and action.

The interview over, he offers us an arcade stick, effectively handing us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for ultimate bragging rights. And you already know the outcome. Ibuki flies in to deliver a crushing finishing blow. Ono tumbles away from the screen, flailing his limbs like a raving octopus, while somehow managing to scream and laugh simultaneously. "How did you get so good?" he cries through his hands. We somehow hold back the tears of purest joy. Today was a good day.



GAME CHANGERS

SOULCALIBUR

Released: 1999 Publisher: Namco Developer: Namco System: Arcade, Dreamcast



Although 3D fighting games allowed players to side-step or roll, the 8-Way Run mechanic was the first time sustained movement was allowed in or out of the screen.

SoulCalibur was the second game in the Souls franchise but the first to introduce the 8-Way Run mechanic, innovating the 3D fighting game genre

■ ■ ■ AFTER RELEASING *SOUL Edge* – the first game in the *Souls* franchise – Namco was keen to listen to the feedback from hardcore fans that emptied their wallets into the various arcade machines attracting fighters around the world. The developer completely deconstructed the game and started to build it again from the ground up, working closely with the *Tekken* development team to craft a fighting game that focused much more on the nuances of animation and speed than its peers, yet still retained the technical complexity that the slower games had come to master.

These changes were so significant that Namco decided to change the name of the game – *Soul Edge 2* would have insinuated more of the same, just a little more jazzed up – and so the now iconic *SoulCalibur* was born. The team at Namco responsible for the arcade release of the game consisted of about 60 staff, reduced to 40 for the Dreamcast port after the initial version had shipped.

It was the port the remaining 40 staff obsessed over that began to define the game – as a launch title for the Dreamcast (in Europe and America, at least), the game was the first arcade port to really highlight

the difference between home-console releases and their cabinet-housed predecessors. *SoulCalibur* on the Dreamcast included a single-player campaign (which, until then, had been quite rare within the fighting game genre) and upgraded all of the game's stages to take advantage of the console's processor, rendering them in full 3D rather than the static 2D backgrounds players were used to seeing in the earlier release. The result was a game that felt completely different to its arcade counterpart, setting a trend for the other fighting games (both 2D and 3D) that were releasing around the same time.

■ ■ ■ *SoulCalibur* is largely famous for its seminal 8-Way Run feature – a movement mechanic that took full advantage of the game's 3D nature. 3D fighters had existed within the fighting genre before – *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* being the most notable – but it was the introduction of the 8-Way Run that really opened up the genre. *SoulCalibur* (and *Soul Edge* before it) were the only games – aside from the ill-fated *Battle Arena Toshinden* – that implemented weapons into their battle systems. Namco wanted to keep the weapons a central crux of the game for *SoulCalibur*,

MAKING HISTORY

SOULCALIBUR ACTUALLY DRAWS A FAIR AMOUNT FROM HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY... AND BRUCE LEE



KING ARTHUR'S EXCALIBUR

★ The actual name of the *Soul Calibur* weapon is taken, in part, from the central sword of the Arthurian legend. As it turns out, both of these swords share rather similar traits: they are both holy weapons designed to vanquish evil and are wielded by brave paladins on quests of vengeance.



THE WORKS OF MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

★ Ghostly pirate and gunblade-user Cervantes is loosely based on the Spanish novelist of the same name. It's rumoured that Cervantes (in-game) is taken from the impressions left by the titular hero Don Quixote – the self-deceptive and doomed hero of Cervantes' first novel.



GREEK GODS

★ There's a strong basis in Greek mythology surrounding central character Sophitia, her sister Cassandra and – later – Pyrrha and Patrokolos. All of them are Holy-aligned, inspired by Greek god of the Forge and Fire, Hephaestus, who wants to destroy Soul Edge because, simply, he didn't make it. Ego of the Gods, eh?



BRUCE LEE

★ Maxi – a wandering pirate trained in the arts of nunchaku – is another in a long line of fighting game characters that has been not just inspired by but actually based on the famous Chinese movie star; fitting in line with *Tekken's* Law, *Mortal Kombat's* Liu Kang, *Street Fighter's* Fei Long and *Dead Or Alive's* Jann Lee.

so the 'Weapon Break' of *Soul Edge* was taken out. The combination of permanent weapon combat and the 8-Way Run made *SoulCalibur* one of the most tactile games on the market; the ability to position yourself at will around your opponent went hand-in-hand with extended reach and varied movepool weapons allowed to each character.

By having each character fight with different types of weapon, Namco also opened up a whole realm of possibilities for interesting and diverse move-set designs. From the bushido-inspired sheathing and drawing attacks of Mitsurugi to Ivy's enchanted and alchemical whip-sword, *SoulCalibur* afforded itself freedom to include characters that other franchises could only dream about. This means that where games such as *Tekken* or *Street Fighter* or *King Of Fighters* would see palette-swapped characters or perhaps an overlap in moveset, *SoulCalibur* stood alone as being the only fighter game with a truly unique cast of characters.

Myriad fighters with myriad fighting styles meant there was more of a focus on defence in *SoulCalibur* than in other fighters, too. The jump mechanic from

KEY FACTS

■ The 8-Way Run system came from a Namco demo that featured a character running free through a field. The *Soul* devs used it and found it made a perfect marriage with weapon-based combat.

■ *SoulCalibur* is the only *Soul* game not to appear on a PlayStation system of any kind.

■ Across all the series' entries, the game has sold over 13 million units.

■ Many critics cite *SoulCalibur* as the most important game on the Dreamcast – toting it as a system seller due to how it showed off the graphical capabilities of the hardware.

Soul Edge was nerfed for *SoulCalibur*, becoming little more than a hop, so defensive play became less about evasion and more about the active block that was mapped to one of the face buttons – a curio in fighting games of the time. Having to actively choose when to block rendered you stationary, your only defensive flexibility coming from the Guard Impact mechanic – a staggering parry that could be triggered by pressing guard/forward. Having a longer window to pull off your Impacts moved the *Soul* series away from the rock-paper-scissors paradigm that *Edge* set up and made the whole fighting system seem much more rhythmic and balanced.

■■■ The medieval fantasy setting of the game was also in contrast to *SoulCalibur's* more modern peers. Moving between feudal Japan, the imposing castles of Germany, Indian docks and Caribbean caves – all rendered in 3D – allowed the game's diverse roster a fitting variety of locales. With the single-player campaign hashing out the foundations of a sprawling narrative that would live for six more games and two spin-offs (and counting), *SoulCalibur's* console release proved that there was a huge market for fighting games on the home console, and established Namco as the leading force in 3D fighters for generations to come.



NAMCO OPENED UP A WHOLE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERESTING AND DIVERSE MOVE-SET DESIGNS



GAME CHANGERS

THE 10 STRANGEST SOULCALIBUR MOMENTS

SOULCALIBUR HAS HAD SOME TRULY OFF-THE-WALL MOMENTS. FROM BIZARRE CROSS-OVERS TO CRAZY GLITCHES, HERE ARE THE TOP 10 MOST ODD THINGS WE'VE ENCOUNTERED



LIGHTSABER BATTLES IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE (SOULCALIBUR IV)

■ IT'S ODD SEEING the guest characters *SoulCalibur* brings in matched up against recurring characters and seeing them fight in hilarious locations. With *SoulCalibur IV*, Yoda, Darth Vader and the horrifically named Starkiller were all added to the roster, allowing amazing Force battles in broken castles and floating platforms.



THE WEIRD TRANSLATION IN SOULCALIBUR II (SOULCALIBUR II)

■ IN THE ENGLISH version of *SoulCalibur II*, Cervantes and Ivy's destined battle opens with the pirate father saying "Come back to me, my child." Nothing too weird about that. In Japanese, though, Cervantes says "Return to me the soul I have allowed you," which is like a patriarchal power trip you'd find in a Victorian gothic novel.



FIGHTING ENEMIES WITH A REAL-LIFE FISHING ROD (SOULCALIBUR)

■ THE DREAMCAST HAD a range of forward-thinking but useless peripherals. One of the more intriguing uses of the various Sega hardware was the motion-sensing fishing rod that could be swung around in front of your TV to simulate attacks. Just don't try doing this when playing as kunai-wielder Taki...



VOLDO (SOUL EDGE)

■ SEEMINGLY A BLIND, mute and deaf slave that was horrifically abused by his merchant master, Voldo somehow manages to defend his (now) dead master's money pit despite all of these physical handicaps. His penchant for bondage gear and ridiculous codpieces makes him iconic, but we think potentially for all the wrong reasons.

GAME CHANGERS: SOULCALIBUR



MAKING BIPOLAR DISORDER A MECHANIC (SOULCALIBUR III)

■ TIRA IS NOTABLE for two reasons: first, her costumes are infamous for their lack of coverage on her bosom. Second, her attacks change depending on her mood. Labelled Jolly and Gloomy, Tira's two states randomly switch, with gloomy attacks inflicting self-harm as an exchange for more damage to enemies.



HAVING AN ALIEN BATTLE FOR THE SOULS OF HUMANS (SOULCALIBUR II)

■ NECRID IS A WEIRD character that has only appeared in *SoulCalibur II*, designed by Todd McFarlane – the creator of *Spawn* (who also appeared in the Xbox version). Necrid had little to no backstory, no motive and no weapon. He just seemed like a filler character in the game after *Soul Edge* because... why not?



THE GENTLEMAN TROLL (SOULCALIBUR: BROKEN DESTINY)

■ FIRST APPEARING IN the PSP spin-off *Broken Destiny*, Dampierre was supposed to be a con-artist, but ended up being an international war criminal instead. He is the *SoulCalibur* troll character by default now, fighting with two hidden blades and throwing himself all over the stage – *incredibly* irritating to fight.



YOU CAN'T TRUST PEOPLE WITH CUSTOM CONTENT (SOULCALIBUR V)

■ THE CREATE-A-SOUL mode in *SoulCalibur V* allowed you freedom to create your own characters with a fighting style based on that of a pre-existing character. Thing is, when the general population got hold of this, the only players you'd fight online would have huge phallic attachments fixed to their crotches. Nice.



HARADA'S CAMEOS (SOULCALIBUR V)

■ KATSUHIRO HARADA – THE creative force driving heading up the *Tekken* series and working also on *Project Soul* – is renowned for his sense of humour and zany approach to game-making. The best manifestation of this is in *SoulCalibur V*, where he is a playable character, fighting with Heihachi's Mishima-karate style. We're a fan of fourth-wall breaking – and this does it well.



FIGHTING IN THE NUDE (SOULCALIBUR IV)

■ *SOULCALIBUR IV* INTRODUCED a mechanic designed to debuff the benefits of constant blocking – the Soul Gauge. If you continued to block hit upon hit, your Gauge would deplete, rendering you in a Soul Crush: a fancy term for breaking your clothes off. This was a popular feature with – let's just say – a certain kind of player.

A MOMENT WITH... CAPCOM

KEY FIGUREHEADS

Kenzo Tsujimoto
Haruhiro Tsujimoto

ACQUISITIONS



>> Final Fight
[1989]



>> Resident Evil
[1996]



>> Devil May Cry
[2001]



>> Street Fighter IV
[2009]



An industry giant, Capcom is dedicated to innovating and reinventing across a multitude of platforms, genres and licences. Chatting to **games™** about *Street Fighter X Tekken*, producer Tamaoki Ayano addresses online complaints and the intricacies of producing another complex brawler



TAMAOKI AYANO

What has been your post-launch aim for *Street Fighter X Tekken* since joining Capcom as a producer?

>> As the new producer of *Street Fighter X Tekken*, I've taken over from Ono-san, and I feel like it's now my purpose at Capcom to spread fighting games and spread *Street Fighter X Tekken* to as many platforms as possible. So although we're only working on the Vita version right now, if I ever got the order from the higher-ups to make a 3DS version or an iPad version I would be ready and very happy to do that. It really comes down to the opportunities that we get, but we're definitely open to making the game on other platforms.

Was the inclusion of infinite combos an intentional decision or a genuine mistake?

>> Infinite combos were a complete mistake on the development side. We have people playing the game daily; we have our team trying to find these infinite combos before the game gets released, and we did actually find a whole bunch of infinite combos during our testing phase. But, obviously, when the game gets released and tens of thousands of people start playing at the same time they're going to be able to find things that we missed. A lot of the infinite combos were character-specific or required very strict timing, so while we do extensively test our games to try and find as many issues as we can it is really difficult to find all of the infinite combos that are in the game. So gameplay balance is a really tricky thing and we do our best. We're definitely aware of the ones that are out there now, and we're working behind the scenes to fix them and get a patch out as soon as possible.

Did the free patches act as an apology to players for the online-related complaints?

>> Basically, with *Street Fighter X Tekken* we always had the plan to provide users with both free and paid content. That was always the plan from the beginning. In terms

of continuous support, we're aware of the online sound issues and infinite combos. These are things that we feel should be taken care of. But in terms of giving users free gems and replay analysers, things like that, we don't see it as an apology really. It's more like we want to show them that we're committed to supporting *Street Fighter X Tekken* in the long term.

Do console fighting games suffer by not going through a location test like arcade games do?

>> I wouldn't say that the game suffered because we didn't do a location test. The fact that we made it for consoles actually means that we got the game into the hands of players through special events a lot sooner than we would have done with an arcade game. So we've been taking *Street Fighter X Tekken* all over the world, to all sorts of events, for a good year or two, so if you add up all the people who have played the game over time it's probably more than a traditional location test actually. So, although I do think that location tests do help, it's going to be different no matter what when the game finally goes online and you get tens of thousands of people playing it.

What do you personally hope to see in Namco Bandai's *Tekken X Street Fighter*?

>> You know, we always keep close contact with Namco Bandai's Harada-san, who's in charge of the *Tekken X Street Fighter* project. He's actually always joking that it will take until 2018 before that game comes out, so they have a long way to go in the development process. Just judging by that, I really want to see what they'll do with Ryu's hadoken. After six years of development it better look really good or I'll be disappointed.



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SUPER SMASH BROS.

AFTER GETTING HANDS-ON WITH BOTH THE WII U AND 3DS SUPER SMASH BROS. **GAMES™** TALKS TO SERIES CREATOR MASAHIRO SAKURAI ABOUT THE MOST DIFFICULT GAME OF HIS CAREER

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Bandai Namco, HAL Labs.
ETA: 3 October (3DS), 2014 TBC (Wii U)

■ MARIO, SONIC THE Hedgehog, Mega Man and Pac-Man all step into the arena. If this was 1991, the games industry might have imploded. But this is 2014, and while the popularity of these pixel pioneers has been on the wane in recent years, there's still a palpable excitement in the room as *Super Smash Bros.* creator Masahiro Sakurai pits these iconic creations against one another in the latest sequel in his fighter franchise.

"It really is a miracle," beams an ebullient Sakurai to the gathered room of journalists. "[We have] four of the most famous characters in the videogame industry on the same screen battling each other. The only game that makes this possible is *Super Smash Bros.*"

"And, just between you and me," he adds, leaning towards the crowd as if to whisper in the ear of each participant, "I'm aiming to make this the number-one character game in the world."

He may have done just that. After branching out into third-party characters in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* to incorporate Mario's long-standing rival Sonic and *Metal Gear Solid's* Snake, Sakurai ostensibly posted a tournament invitation to every retro icon that tried to overthrow the mighty plumber during his Eighties and Nineties reign. And while Sonic has been zealous in his willingness to team-up with Mario in recent years and Mega Man's inclusion in the game is well known by now, it's the addition of Pac-Man that had the crowd wakka-wakking in delight.

/// "The new *Smash Bros.* is being developed by Bandai Namco Games and one of Namco's most famous characters is of course, Heihachi." Sakurai cracks a smile. "Just kidding. As he has such a long history, we did our best to bring Pac-Man into the series."

Sakurai is bridging the generations of *Pac-Man* by using his Pac-Land physique,

but also incorporating moves that enable him to transform into the pizza-shape *Pac-Man* form present in his Eighties coin-op. "*Pac-Man* made his debut in 1980, a year before *Mario* arrived, so I really wanted to bring that history into the game," explains Sakurai. "We've also incorporated other *Pac-Man*-esque elements like throwing fruit and eating Pac-pellets."

Sakurai demonstrates the character's abilities in a Smash battle by trouncing the competition (proving that *Pac-Man* is the retro king), but he also delves further into the more technical aspects that make for a divisive change to the core combat of *Smash Bros.*

"I've added the ability to customise characters," reveals the director. "Customising characters doesn't mean adding equipment or whatnot to power-up the character, but rather to adjust the fighting styles of the character."



■ Above: The announcement of *Pac-Man* joins the inclusion of Palutena from *Kid Icarus* and *Mii Fighters* from your own imagination.





"I'M AIMING TO MAKE THIS THE NUMBER-ONE CHARACTER GAME IN THE WORLD."
MASAHIRO SAKURAI, HAL LABS.



Below: Sakurai explained that the reason to remove transformation was partly due to the limitations of the 3DS hardware.



How this works is relatively simple, even if it does add a splash of strategy to the existing mechanics. In previous games, each character had four special moves activated by holding B and pushing in a direction. This time around there are twelve (three for each direction), with one standard move and two variations. For example, Mario's fireball can be tweaked from a standard attack, allowing for a larger, but slower one, or one that fires quickly in a straight line.

"To maintain the game balance, customised fighters will not be available in With Anyone mode," confirms Sakurai. However, two other new additions to the character roster, Palutena and Mii Fighters, won't be limited to variations of standard attacks; instead they will feature unique special attacks.

In fact, the decision to include the Mii Fighters was a difficult one for Sakurai. The veteran developer struggled with balancing the family-friendly appearance of the Miis – made in the image of their creator – with the violence of the *Smash Bros.* universe.

"Mii characters have had an image of being a peaceful, at home character, kind of like your Wii console," says Sakurai. "They don't really fit the image of *Smash Bros.*, where you're beating up and dominating other players."

However, Sakurai would be inundated with requests on a daily basis, not just to add Miis, but characters that simply can't exist within the universe – Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime being overwhelmingly popular with the game's focal fanbase.

"I thought 'if you want him in the game, why don't you make him?'" laughs Sakurai. "So I created a tool for you to do just that. With the Mii Fighter creator you can have any character you want join the battle."

/// All these characters will be available on both the Wii U and 3DS and were chosen right at the beginning of the game's development – Sakurai admits he was lucky that Geninja proved popular, as development started long before *Pokémon X* and *Y* was released.

It was a necessary risk, however, given that balance and variety would be important not just for traditional brawling, but also in other single and multiplayer modes. Exclusive to the 3DS, *Smash Run* (based on *City Trial* from *Kirby's Air Ride*) has players navigating the environment littered with classic enemies from Nintendo franchises, collecting power-ups before facing each other in battle at the end of the time limit.



"You'll gain equipable items in *Smash Run*," Sakurai explains, delving into the mode further. "Equipable items have three characteristics: attack, defence and speed. A character's fighting style will be impacted by what that character has equipped. Fundamentally, raising one characteristic will, in turn, decrease another. This way you can create a slower, more powerful Mario, or a quicker, lighter Mario. So this isn't simply a matter of increasing parameters to create a powerful fighter, but adjusting parameters to create a unique fighting style."

/// Sakurai continues to innovate in and outside of the game. Amiibo figurines work in a similar way to *Skylanders* or *Disney Infinity* models, utilising near-field communication technology to place characters in the game. These figurines will store your character data between each *Smash Bros.* fight. "The character won't appear as a CP [Computer Player] but an FP – a Figure Player," explains Sakurai. "You do not control Figure Players; you level up the FP each time you use it to fight. An FP becomes stronger physically, and it can exceed the strength of a Level 9 computer player. The FPs can be raised to level 50, and it's a fairly quick process to level them up. The figure's brain is a computer, so it will change its way of thinking over time based on the opponent's fighting tactics. It will remember that shielding characters don't move, and it may focus on throwing characters to break their shields. You can slightly alter an FP's attack, defence, and speed by giving it equipable items."

Of course, this won't be a feature that will be available in the 3DS and might go in some way to explain why there's a delay between the Wii U and its handheld counterpart. Sakurai dispels any concerns that it's a cynical move and that it's down to the sheer scale of

development. "This is a really big game with a huge scale, and there's so many combinations of things that we have to test," says Sakurai. "We're talking several hundred people working on just that. If we were going to do both of those versions at the same time, you can imagine the amount of people we'd need to do, we'd need to call in thousands of people. Each game has a unique architecture; they really are different, unique games, so each one requires complete attention not only in completing the game, but also in the debug process. To make sure each game gets the full attention, we decided to release them months apart."

Sakurai stresses that this game has been the most difficult of his career and loaded with the expectation from the core *Smash Bros.* community after the relative disappointment of *Smash Bros. Brawl*'s accessible slant, this latest entry has been the most difficult balancing act yet.

"One of the goals we've set for ourselves is that 'this is a party game'," reveals Sakurai. "We want a lot of people to pick up and play – that's one reason why we have the For Fun/ For Glory mode separation this time around."

"I think with *Brawl*, if people hadn't played the series before and this was their first *Smash*, there was a lot that appealed to them, but the *Smash* veterans didn't see it as their cup of tea," concludes Sakurai. "One thing as a developer I have to keep in mind is that it's not enough to make a game that will satisfy our core fanbase. We have to reach out and appeal to new players. Finding that sweet spot is always difficult."



■ Above: There has been some balancing to the core roster. For instance, Bowser is now heavier and able to take more hits, balancing out his power.





"EACH GAME HAS A UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE; THEY REALLY ARE DIFFERENT, UNIQUE GAMES"

MASAHIRO SAKURAI, HAL LABS.

Below: Not all the characters in *Smash Bros* will get their own Amiibo figurines, however Sakurai hopes that gamers will not seek to own them all, but instead will focus on individual fighters.

